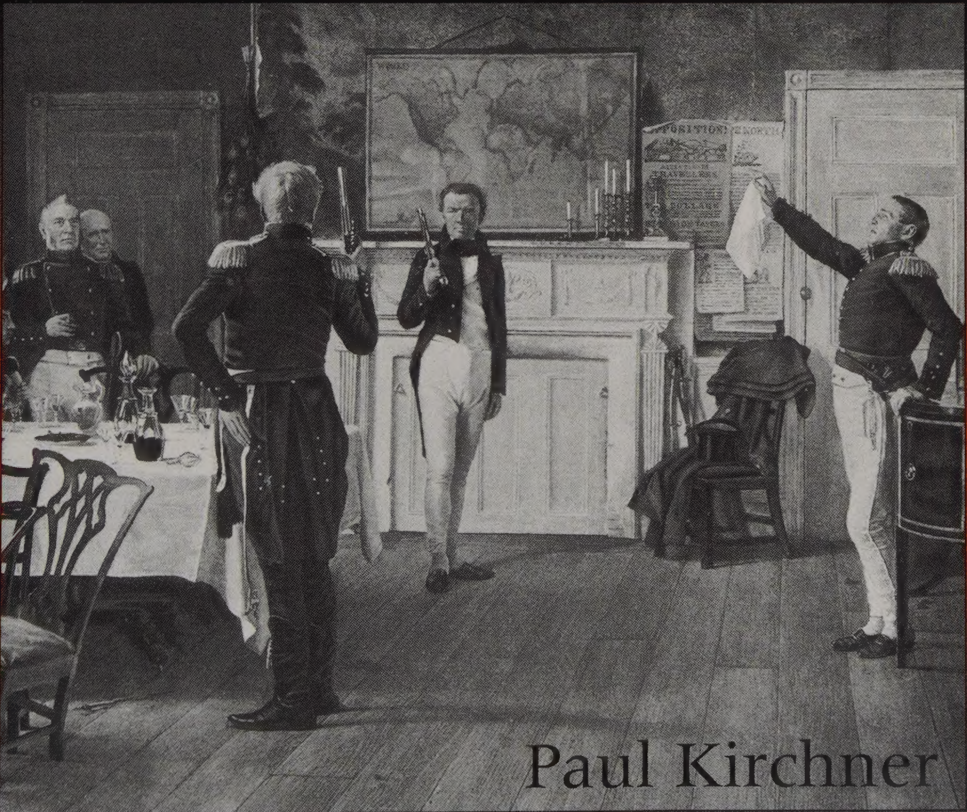
Dueling with the Sword and Pistol

400 Years of One-on-One Combat



Paul Kirchner

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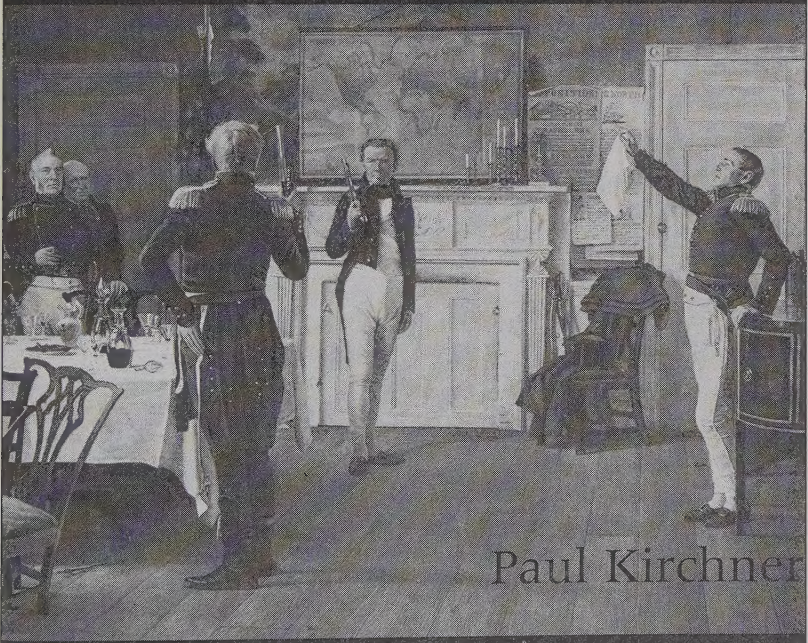

Paul Kirchner

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Also by Paul Kirchner:

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Dueling with the Sword and Pistol:
400 Years of One-on-One Combat
by Paul Kirchner

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To Eric, fellow student

PREFACE

On the morning of March 7, 1804, Lord Camelford and Capt. Thomas Best met in a meadow outside London. The two had long been friends, but a few days earlier Fanny Simmonds, a woman with whom both had had relations, told Camelford that Best had spoken of him contemptuously. When Best denied the accusation, Camelford angrily called him a liar, a scoundrel, and a ruffian, leaving Best no alternative but to challenge him. The night before the duel, Best attempted to reconcile the matter, but Camelford dismissed him, saying, "This is child's play; the thing must go on." To a friend, Camelford admitted privately that he no longer believed Simmonds' accusation but was reluctant to apologize lest people suspect he was afraid of Best, who had a reputation as a dead shot.

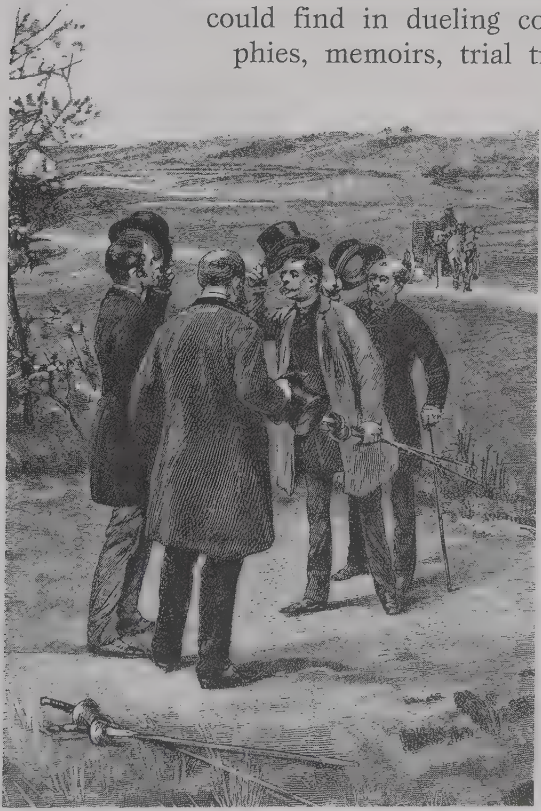
On the field, Best made one last attempt to resolve things peacefully, saying, "Camelford, we have been friends, and I know the unsuspecting generosity of

> your nature. Upon my honor, you have been imposed upon by a strumpet. Do not insist upon expressions under which one of us must fall."
>
> Camelford replied, "Mr. Best, I do not come here to be trifled with: take your ground and prepare yourself."
>
> Standing at a distance of 12 paces, they leveled their saw-handled Tatham & Egg pistols at each other. As they awaited the signal to fire, Camelford noticed that Best was aiming slightly to the side of him, indicating he intended to throw his shot. "That won't do!" he said firmly.
>
> At the signal, Camelford fired. Only after hearing the ball whiz past his ear did Best discharge his own pistol. His ball penetrated Camelford's right breast between the fourth and fifth ribs (breaking the latter), passed through his right lung, and lodged in his sixth dorsal vertebra, severing his spinal cord. Camelford staggered and slumped to the ground.
>
> Best ran to his friend's side. Camelford gave him his hand and said, "Best, I am a dead man, and though you have killed me I fully forgive you; it was not your fault." He then advised him to flee for his own safety and later refused to identify him when the authorities questioned him. Lord Camelford, who had turned 29 less than two weeks before, lingered three days before dying.

The duel of honor has long had a hold on the popular imagination, and in the Camelford-Best affair we see four of the elements that make it so compelling.

First, there is the inherent drama of mortal combat, fought willingly and on equal terms. Second, the people involved were society's elite. Third, there is the contrast of manners and murderousness; the sense that, while two men may intend to kill each other, there's no need to be rude about it. Fourth, there is the glamorous but archaic notion of honor, "that enigmatic mixture of conscience and egoism,"[1] which may no longer count for much, but for which men of power, wealth, and position were once willing to sacrifice their lives.

In the course of researching this book I have read everything I could find on the duel, from early fencing manuals and codes of honor to 19th-century editorials against the practice to current academic analyses of the social forces underlying it. What interested me most, though, were detailed accounts of the duels themselves, especially those from participants or eyewitnesses. I have collected the best such accounts I could find in dueling compendiums, biographies, memoirs, trial transcripts, historical journals, and English- and foreign-language newspapers, going back 400 years. Some of these duels are among the most famous ever fought, while others were obscure even in their own time. Though they follow a similar pattern, each supplies some variation, some nuance, some quirk of character or incident. As often as possible I have presented the orig-



inal sources verbatim to maintain their immediacy, authenticity, and detail. Together, I believe they provide a good overview of this strikingly savage yet civilized ritual.

As background, I have provided material on the notion of honor, the code of the duel, and the techniques and procedures for fighting with the sword and pistol. The history of fencing is an area in which scholars have been particularly active in the past 15 years, overturning a great deal of previously accepted wisdom. I have done my best to keep up with the current scholarship, and as much as possible have let the original sources speak for themselves and kept my own commentary to a minimum.

In transcribing early material I have made minor corrections to punctuation and spelling where necessary for clarity.

In researching this book, I benefited from certain resources that did not exist even 10 years ago, such as the many searchable archives and databases on the Web. I am particularly grateful to the members of Yahoo's Classical Fencing Group for their patience and generosity toward an interested student of their art; I have received a lot of intelligent answers to my often naive questions.

I am indebted to Jeff Cooper, Kenneth Robinson, and Joe Sledge for their encouragement and review of the manuscript.

For his technical expertise on swordsmanship, I would like to thank John Clements. I

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For his invaluable translations of Italian newspaper articles I wish to thank Paolo Franceschi, and my friend Alexandra Franceschi for putting me in touch with him.

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Without the encouragement, advice, and assistance of Jon Ford, editorial director of Paladin Press, and Donna DuVall, my editor, this project would not have become a book.

I would also like to thank my fencing instructors John Hart, Jesse Ford, and Lureen Galayda for giving me an introduction to the practice of fencing.

I would like to express my appreciation for the staff and resources of the Miller Memorial Library in Hamden, Connecticut; the Sterling Memorial Library and Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale University; the British Library; and the New York Public Library.

NOTES

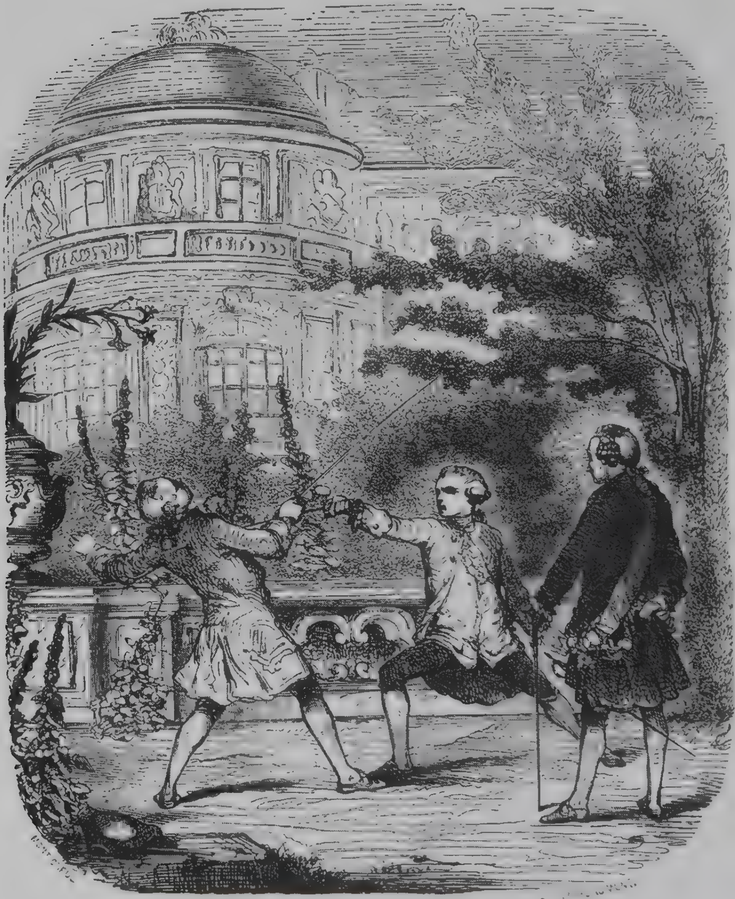
1. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Macmillan, Co., 1914): 433.

INTRODUCTION:
THE DUEL OF HONOR

The duel of honor grew out of the medieval traditions of trial by combat and the joust. Trial by combat was a legal procedure, sanctioned in the faith that God would favor the righteous; the duel retained this wild sense of justice without any illusion of divine intervention. The joust was a fight between noblemen, equally armed and equipped, to determine who was superior in prowess, and many duels had an element of this as well.

The duel of honor might be defined as

- a consensual fight between two gentlemen,
- with matched deadly weapons,
- in accordance with rules implicitly or explicitly agreed upon,
- over a point of honor,
- usually accompanied by seconds (who might themselves fight),
- and in contravention of the law.



This type of duel arose in Spain and Italy in the 15th century and spread across Europe in the next 100 years. It was taken up in the United States during its revolution, whereas Russia did not adopt it until the 1830s, shortly before England gave it up. It was not adopted in Latin America until late in the 19th century, at about the time it fell out of fashion in the United States. Duels were fought in France, Italy, Hungary, and Latin America until the mid-20th century, and continue to be fought in a stylized form by German students to this day.

Duels that met all the above conditions except the presence of seconds were called *rencontres.*

HONOR

At the heart of the duel was the concept of honor. As defined by anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers, honor is "the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride."[1] A combination of character and reputation, honor was considered by a gentleman to be his most important attribute—indeed, his very being. It determined the role he would play in society and the rewards he might expect, the heights to which he might rise as a leader, his opportunities for a favorable marriage, the prospects of his children, and his ability to attract friends and punish enemies.

Honor was associated with a number of virtues, but its sine qua non was courage. A man must value his honor more than his life and always be ready to fight in defense of his reputation. In addition to physical courage, he also had to have what was usually called honesty but which might better be termed moral courage. He must stand behind his word whatever the consequences; he must "say what he means and mean what he says."[2]

Among those who had honor, there were always those who had more and those who had less. The quickest way to elevate one's status was either by asserting dominance over another man with an affront or by aggressively responding to a perceived affront with a demand for an apology or a challenge to duel. As the 18th-century philosopher Bernard Mandeville wrote, "Most of those who gained honor did so solely by their courage and intrepidity, because those are the only parts of our character which it is always in our power to demonstrate. The best friend a king has may [lack] an opportunity to show his loyalty; so a man may be just and chaste, and yet not be able to convince the world that he is so; but he may pick a quarrel and show that he dares to fight when he pleases, especially if he converses with men of the sword. Where the principle of honor was in high esteem, vanity and impatience must have always prompted the most proud and forward to seek after opportunities of [distinguishing] themselves, in order to be styled men of honor."[3]

"Respect and precedence are paid to those who claim it and are sufficiently powerful to enforce their claim," wrote Pitt-Rivers. "Just as possession is said to be nine-tenths of the law, so the *de facto* achievement of honour depends upon the ability to silence anyone who would dispute the title."[4]

In the realm of honor, might makes right.

INSULTS

Every duel began with an affront, categorized by the level of seriousness. At the lowest level was simple impoliteness: a greeting not returned, an impertinent comment or glance, a jostle in a crowd, or an overly sharp contradiction. Such slights might be overlooked, but if they were witnessed by a man's peers he might lose face if he failed to react.

If he had no intention to offend, the man responsible might offer explanations, which, if accepted, would resolve the matter. A man of honor rarely offered a contrite apology, though, as it might be taken as a sign of weakness.

At the next level was the deliberate insult, particularly the use of such "fighting words" as *liar, coward, rascal, scoundrel, puppy*, and *blackguard*. These could only be forgiven if the offender claimed to have misspoken and then explicitly disavowed the sentiment; that is, if he had said, "You are a liar and no gentleman," he must say. "I believe the party insulted to be a man of the strictest veracity and a gentleman." To claim intoxication helped mitigate an offense and had the advantage of being true as often as not.

In the original Italian honor codes the proper response to an insult was to declare, "You lie!" which was called the *mentità*, or "giving the lie." This put the onus of issuing the challenge on the offender.

An insult might be well grounded or transparently false, but that was not the issue—what mattered to the gentleman was that another had dared insult him. Rhetorically speaking, when a man of honor was told that he smelled bad he did not reach for a bar of soap, but for his pistol; he did not care that he stank, but that someone had the temerity to point it out. At the court of Marie Antoinette, there was an office of the guards named Count de Montrond who had a tendency to deal off the bottom of the deck. He was gambling with a M. de Champagne when the latter accused him of cheating. Throwing his cards in Champagne's face, Montrond replied coolly, "Very possibly, but I don't choose that anyone should tell me so." They fought the next day, and Montrond was severely wounded. When he recovered, he again called Champagne out. This time Montrond killed him, though again he was wounded. After that, those who played cards with Montrond may have been reluctant to point out his cheating; thus he had successfully defended his honor.[5]

Of all affronts, those involving physical contact were the most serious. A blow might be struck in the heat of passion, or it might be delivered quite deliberately, to shame a man into a duel. It need not be intended to inflict injury—to pull a man's nose or slap him lightly with a glove showed particular contempt. Among the more refined, it was *déclassé* to actually lay hands on a man; it was sufficient to put one's hand on the hilt of one's sheathed sword, to raise one's fist or cane, or to say something along the lines of, "Consider yourself horsewhipped," or "If you will not give me satisfaction, I shall be forced to slap you." By the end of the 19th century in France, one observer noted, "In this land of settled formulae, blows are seldom struck between men. . . . [They] content themselves with raising their canes threateningly and patiently, until some mutual friend or stranger intervenes. Why strike? The *potential* blow fell when the cane or fist was raised."[6] A blow could rarely be forgiven without a duel, though under some codes the offender could apologize and offer his victim a stick or whip with which he might hit him in return.

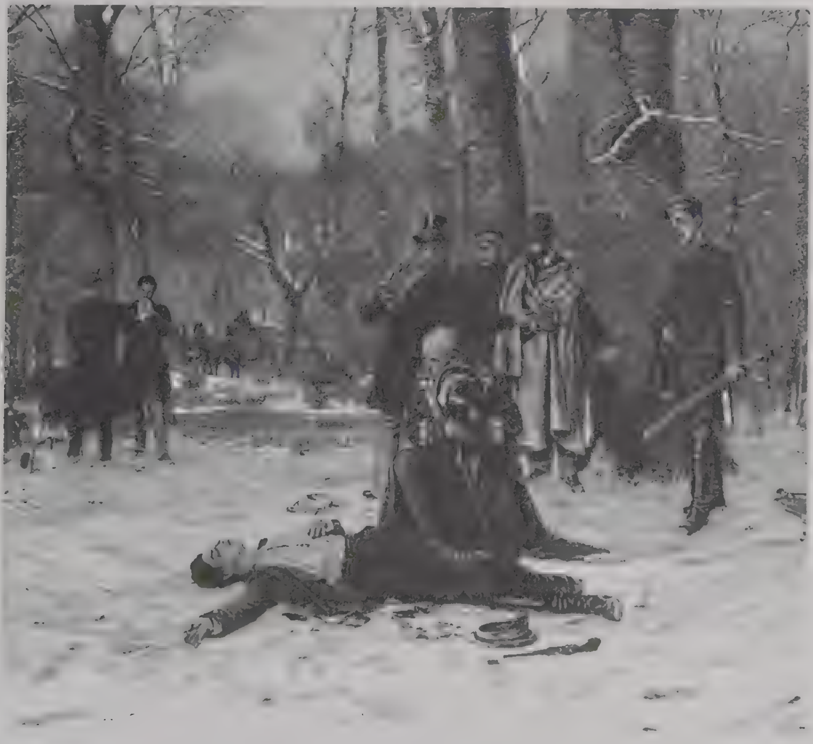
As serious as a physical blow was an offense against a woman under a man's care, particularly the seduction of a wife or daughter.

Resenting the Insult

A gentleman was expected to react promptly to a provocation—to *resent* it, as was said. Ideally he would do so resolutely but in a manner that showed he had complete control over his emotions—the quality the French prized as sangfroid. He might say something like, "You shall hear from me," and exchange calling cards with his antagonist or wait until the following morning and write his antagonist a firm but courteous letter stating the offense and requesting clarification. This would begin an exchange of letters, which would result either in reconciliation or a duel. Not everyone could manage such self-control, so men often reacted to an insult with such vituperation that a peaceful resolution was rendered impossible. Still, better a display of unbridled rage than of mild forbearance, which could cost a man all claim to honor.

A gentleman did not have to respond to an insult from a woman, a minor, a family member, a lunatic, a criminal, or a man who did not qualify as a gentleman. The last category included any man known to have previously accepted an insult without resenting it; he was deemed a coward, and the insults of a coward carried no sting. A man of prominence could refuse a challenge from one significantly beneath him in status, but before he did so he should have already secured his reputation for courage. Charles Mackay gave the example of Sir Walter Raleigh, who was known to have fought a number of duels in his youth. When a young man with whom he was arguing in a coffeehouse lost his temper and spat in his face, Sir Walter wiped it off with his handkerchief and said, "If I could as easily wipe from my conscience the stain of killing you as I can this spittle from my face, you should not live another minute." The young man immediately begged his pardon. Raleigh's reputation was such that he could effectively exert his dominance even in declining to fight.[7]

If a gentleman was offended by a man who was not worthy of a duel, he might beat him with a cane or whip or have his servants do so.



A 19th-century German print entitled "Over Nothing."

When a serious insult was not involved, an opponent could be skewered as effectively with wit as with steel. The presence of mind necessary to deliver a devastating comeback belied the suspicion of fear and made the other party look petty if he continued to press his case. For example, after a heated argument in the Louisiana legislature in 1817, five-foot-eight-inch Representative Marigny challenged Representative Humble, an ex-blacksmith who stood nearly seven feet tall. Humble replied, "I accept, and in the exercise of my privilege, I stipulate that the duel shall take place in Lake Pontchartrain, in six feet of water, sledge hammers to be used as weapons."[8] Marigny was made a laughingstock.

Similarly, there was a Frenchman named Madailan who sent a challenge to the Marquis de Rivard, who had lost a leg at the siege of Puy Cerda. The old soldier replied, "I accept your challenge on one condition—that you cut off one of your legs, so that we may meet on an equal footing." The challenge was hastily withdrawn.[9]

SECONDS

When a duel was in the offing, each principal sought out another man or often two men to act as his second or seconds. In the early days of dueling seconds often fought each other, but in a more refined era their primary duty was to seek a peaceful resolution consistent with their principals' honor, and evidence suggests that most conflicts were resolved without a duel being fought.

Once appointed, the seconds handled all communication; the principals were to have no direct contact.

Before a man accepted the role of second, he had to be certain that his principal was of suitable status to challenge his opponent. If the opponent rejected the cartel because he considered the challenger unworthy, it was regarded as an insult to the second who represented him.

The choice of a second was a matter of the utmost importance: a principal was entrusting his honor to his second's discretion and his life to his second's judgment. One tract on dueling advises, "He should run over the names of his friends, and endeavour to obtain the services of a staid, calculating fellow—if possible, one who has seen some few shots exchanged."[10]

Mackay wrote that "the highest mark of friendship one man could manifest towards another was to choose him for his second." However, he added dryly, "many gentlemen were so desirous of serving in this capacity that they endeavored to fan every slight misunderstanding into a quarrel, that they might have the pleasure of being engaged in it."[11] There was some truth to the suggestion that seconds sometimes inflamed conflicts rather than resolved them. Fencing master Augustin Grisier's observation that "it is not the sword or the bullet, but the seconds that kill" was widely repeated, as was the story of the Irish duelist who whispered to his opponent, "I'll shoot your second if you'll shoot mine." The archetype of the fire-eating second was Sir Lucius O'Trigger, who goaded his reluctant principal Bob Acres in Richard Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals* (1776).

THE TERMS

If reconciliation proved impossible due to the seriousness of the offense or the intractability of the parties, the seconds arranged a duel, often writing up the terms in a formal document that they signed.

In early days, great importance was attached to the designation of challenger and challenged because the latter was allowed to seek maximum advantage in the selection of weapons and terms. In his chronicle of 16th-century dueling, Pierre de Brantôme, seigneur de Bourdeilles, gives several examples, such as that of a short man challenged by a taller one who insisted that they both wear steel collars with spikes pointing upward.

This allowed him to look up but prevented his opponent from looking down; he won his fight with little trouble. Later, this sort of advantage seeking was regarded as dishonorable, and the challenged party could only choose between one of the accepted weapons of honor—the smoothbore pistol, smallsword, or saber—and even then, a man who knew nothing about fencing could refuse the sword. Other conditions had to be those commonly accepted.

There was an American case in 1842 in which the challenged party demanded outrageously advantageous terms: it involved a young Illinois lawyer named Abraham Lincoln. After being identified as the author of several scurrilous columns about a political opponent, James Shields, Lincoln accepted his challenge. For weapons, the six-foot four-inch, long-armed Lincoln chose "cavalry broadswords of the largest size" and specified that a no-man's land six feet wide be established between the combatants. Whichever party stepped over the line would be deemed to have surrendered. The five-foot, nine-inch Shields accepted, but while contemplating the situation on the dueling field, he agreed to an accommodation. Historian Douglas L. Wilson wrote, "It is tempting to see Lincoln's sense of humor at work in these specifications, especially in the blatant manner in which they work to his advantage . . . but the humor here is more likely a function of hindsight. All indications are that Lincoln took his situation seriously and crafted his terms deliberately as a means of avoiding defeat."[12]

SATISFACTION

Once a duel had begun, it might continue through a number of separate sword assaults or exchanges of fire until the challenger declared that he was "satisfied." With swords, satisfaction required the spilling of at least a few drops of blood; with the pistol, it was not necessary that either party be wounded, but from one to three exchanges might be required, depending on the severity of the offense. Satisfaction was not a matter of who won but was achieved through the duel itself, which restored honor to both principals and represented the resolution of their conflict, after which there was to be no revenge or retaliation.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, it was customary after a duel for the seconds to draw up a report and sign it. In French this was called the *procès-verbal*, and it had the status of a legal document.

THE IMPERATIVE TO FIGHT

In a sense a duel was a public event in that a gentleman's conduct, from the insult through the resolution, was closely observed by his peers. If he showed resolution, spirit, and sangfroid throughout, his reputation would be enhanced, and many men regarded a duel as the best way to "make character." After his fatal affair with Capt. Alexander Boyd, Maj. Henry A. Campbell explained, "I was weak enough to suppose that this duel would add a lustre to my former exploits; and that to kill my man was the only requisite to give the finishing touch to my fame."[13]

Whether or not a gentleman looked forward to a duel, he had little choice but to fight. As Lieutenant Stanton put it in his dueling manual, "If a man does not on the first necessary occasion demonstrate to the world that he possesses a proper degree of courage and resolution, his character sinks into contempt, and he is ever after liable to daily insults."[14]

In Guy de Maupassant's short story "A Coward," the protagonist broods over the consequences of failing to defend his honor:

> He thought of the disgrace, of the whispers at the club, of the laughter in drawing-rooms, of the contempt of women, of the allusions in the papers, of the insults which cowards would fling

> at him. . . . If, when face to face with the other man, he did not show a proper gallantry and calm, he would be lost forever. He would be sullied, branded with a mark of infamy, hounded out of society.[15]

Military officers who failed to resent an insult would be ostracized or worse. In a classic case of "damned if you do and damned if you don't," an officer could be cashiered for refusing to duel as well as for dueling, under the catchall offense of conduct unbecoming an officer. During the reign of George III, a general who apologized to his opponent after the first fire of a duel, despite being the injured party, was told by the Duke of York to surrender his commission. "If I leave the army, what shall I do?" asked the general. "Why, turn dancing master and be damned to you!" was the reply.[16]

Even men of the cloth felt the pressure. In the 1860s, a Southern clergyman trying to arrange a duel with a man who had insulted him explained, "Had I been insulted as a clergyman, I would have accepted it as persecution and would have endured it meekly. But I have been insulted as an individual. My family has a social status and a reputation which I must not allow myself to ignore. . . . I must act suitably to my name."[17]

A gentleman who would not fight might be subject to the additional public humiliation of being posted, meaning that an announcement characterizing him with terms such as coward, liar, and scoundrel would be published in the newspaper or printed up and plastered along the streets.

Once the principals arrived on the ground it was generally too late for reconciliation—if they did not fight they would face ridicule. A case in point involved the Earl of Rochester and John Sheffield, the Earl of Mulgrave, in about 1670. Sheffield had heard that Rochester had made a disparaging remark about him, and though Rochester denied it, he felt obliged to challenge him. As they rode to the ground together, Rochester said that he was feeling ill and was not fit to fight.

As Sheffield recalled, "I was extremely surpriz'd, because at that time no man had a better reputation for courage; and (my anger against him being quite over, because I was satisfied that he never spoke those words I resented) I took the liberty of representing what a ridiculous story it would make, if we returned without fighting; and therefore advised him for both our sakes, especially for his own, to consider better of it; since I must be obliged in my own defence to lay the fault on him by telling the truth of the matter."[18]

Nevertheless, Rochester chose not to fight. The aborted duel was widely discussed in London, and Sheffield noted ruefully that it "entirely ruined [Rochester's] reputation as to Courage."

For a man afraid of a fight, the prospect of an impending duel must have been excruciating. James Boswell, who was involved in several disputes, all of which were resolved through negotiation, was characteristically candid about his jitters in his diaries. He describes seeking advice from various friends and being frustrated by their conflicting advice; lying in bed, "sleepless for agitation," as he anguished over the possibility that he would leave his wife and children destitute; being haunted by the mental image of a death's head. During one such affair in 1776 he managed to get his anxieties under control:

> MARCH 12 . . . This duel of mine, now, has alarmed and distressed me. . . . But, when I have an extensive view of it, I consider thus: If I am killed, the shock is momentary; and death comes as well at one time as another. My wife and children will be consoled in a short time. At any rate I shall not feel their uneasiness; but shall look on it as trifling, and expect them soon to join me in the world of spirits. If I am wounded, my spirits will be raised by a sense of honor and a sort of gallant vanity which a duel justly fought inspires. My greatest uneasiness was the fear of fear; an apprehension that

> my nerves, or whatever else it is, should yield to impressions of danger, though my soul was brave.[19]

FIRE-EATERS AND *BRETTEURS*

While some men might have dreaded the prospect of a duel, others reveled in it, like the member of Louis XVIII's bodyguard who was said to have fought three times in one day: first with a man who had offended him by looking at him sideways, next with one who had looked him directly in the eye, and finally with a stranger who had passed by him without deigning to look at him at all. Such habitual duelists were called fire-eaters, or by the French term *bretteurs* (bullies). One came to Charleston, South Carolina, in the mid-1850s:

> Rumor credited him with having killed two adversaries in duels and reported him as being quick to anger. Rumor became fact when he took a sudden dislike to a young Charleston lawyer, goaded him into a duel, and killed him with one quick shot. Six friends of the deceased barrister then joined together and took a mutual vow to avenge the death of their companion by duelling with the murderer one at a time, until one of the six should be successful. They drew lots for first honor, and the stranger again killed his man with apparent ease. The society of requitors then disbanded. As one of the group later said, "[W]e gave it up. We agreed that nobody stood a ghost of a chance before him. . . . So we decided to let the monster go, and trust to the Almighty to cut short his career . . . [but] he lived to be an old man and died peacefully in his bed."
>
> This particular duellist, it was said, always came to the ground with a smile on his face. Prior to taking his position, he would take a few puffs on a cigar,

> then carefully place it on a nearby stump or rock, saying that he would be back to claim it before it burned out. It is worthy of note that, so long as this man remained in Charleston, he was "neither ignored nor cut," but attended all major social gatherings.[20]

Joseph Addison wrote that during the reign of Charles II a club of dueling enthusiasts was formed in London "in which no one was admitted that had not fought his man. The president was said to have killed half-a-dozen in single combat, and as for the other members, they took their seats according to the number they had slain. There was likewise a side table for those who had only drawn blood, but shown a laudable ambition of taking the first opportunity to qualify themselves for the first table. This club, consisting only of men of honour, did not continue long; most of the members of it being put to the sword, or hanged, a little after its institution."[21]

A similar club was reportedly established in South Carolina in the 1840s. However, when the president lost his life in a duel the club broke up, "as it was an institution founded for killing, and not for being killed."[22]

Some chronic duelists simply enjoyed bullying their peers, while others acted from political motives. In the tumultuous decades following the French Revolution, when political disagreements were so bitter they could be settled only with the sword, bretteurs ran rampant, methodically provoking duels to thin the ranks of their enemies. Two years were particularly fractious: 1815, with the defeat of Napoleon and the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty, and 1830, after the July Revolution in which the Bourbons were overthrown.

One notorious Restoration bretteur was the Comte de Larillière, a native of Bordeaux, who reportedly killed 11 men in some 40 duels. Determined to put an end to his career, a young army officer challenged and killed him.

A gentleman from the south of France named Fayot was another well-known bretteur. His father was guillotined in 1793, and his mother instilled in him the duty of revenge. In 1815 he moved to Paris and put out the word that he was ready to measure swords against anyone who would denigrate the royal family. He dressed in a distinctive green coat and dined in the same restaurant every evening in order to make himself available to those who might want to take up his challenge. Handy with both the sword and pistol, he reportedly fought more than 30 duels in two years without sustaining a serious wound.[23]

There was also an unidentified cadet of a noble family who kept a diary of the duels he provoked. It contained entries such as:

> Dec. 29. St. Gaudens. Killed, agreeably enough, the lieutenant of the local gendarmes. A fine man and a vigorous blade.
>
> Jan. 12. Toulouse. Cracked a student's skull and smashed the sword-arm of an artillery captain. Sorry about the student. As for the artilleryman, it's just another of those fellows out of the way.
>
> March 15. Nérac. Tried to plant several quarrels. No good. Stupid town. Nothing doing.[24]

Bonapartist General Fournier-Sarlovese was a notorious bretteur, best known for his 14-year running duel with General Dupont. The story was fictionalized in Joseph Conrad's "The Duel," the best short story ever written on the theme and depicted in Ridley Scott's masterful *The Duelists* (1977).

WOMEN AND DUELING

Many books on dueling devote a chapter to the female duelist, but the accounts they include are either unverifiable or involve members of the demimonde—actresses, prostitutes, and the occasional cross-dressing adventuress. A woman's honor was defined in terms of chastity, fidelity, and modesty rather than physical courage, so it could not be enhanced through a duel. Nevertheless, women contributed greatly to the social pressure that enforced the practice. Wrote Alexander von Oettingen in 1889, "There exists among ladies a secret appreciation, indeed a feeling of adoration for the 'chivalrous courage' of duelists, while one looks upon young men as hardly complete who dismiss the duel from reasons of conscience and religious-moral conviction. When it be said of a youth that he is disposed against the duel, it counts among many young ladies almost as a defect."[25] As James Pemberton-Grund put it, "By one of those curious contradictions peculiar to the sex, [women] turn faint at the sight of blood, but welcome with a ready smile the duellist who sheds it."[26]

A 17th-century ambassador to France, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, described this phenomenon in an account of a royal ball:

> All things being ready for the ball, and everyone being in his place, and I myself next to the queen, expecting when the dancers would come in, one knocked at the door somewhat louder than became, I thought, a very civil person; when he came in, I remember there was a sudden whisper among the ladies, saying, "C'est Monsieur Balagny!" . . . whereupon I also saw the ladies and gentlemen, one after another, invite him to sit near them; and, which is more, when one lady had his company awhile, another would say, "You have enjoyed him long enough, I must have him now." At which bold civility of them, though I were astonished, yet it added to my wonder that his person

> could not be thought at most but ordinary handsome; his hair, which was cut very short, half grey; his doublet, but of sackcloth cut to his shirt; and his breeches only of plain grey cloth. Informing myself by some standers-by who he was, I was told that he was one of the gallantest men in the world, as having killed eight or nine men in single fight, and that for this reason the ladies made so much of him, it being the manner of all French women to cherish gallant men, as thinking they could not make so much of any else with the safety of their honor.[27]

Just as there were men who relished a duel, there were women who adored being at the center of one. Abraham Bosquet, writing in 1817, attributed many conflicts to "the insinuations of artful, dangerous, and vicious females, and inflammatory mistresses, who pride themselves much in being the object of a duel, and frequently insinuate that dishonorable overtures had been made to them by the nearest connections, or intimate friends of their keepers, with a view, either to enhance their pretended chastity, resent the rejection of their own overtures, or to banish from the society of their friends, those to whom, from various other motives, they had taken dislikes."[28]

The most serious way a woman could entangle her father or husband in a duel was by failing to guard her reputation. In such cases a man was disgraced until he dueled the seducer. If he killed him, justice was felt to have been served, but if he himself was killed, he might have accomplished nothing more than to remove himself as an obstacle. The best-known instance of this occurred in 1667, when the Duke of Buckingham was called out by the Earl of Shrewsbury for having conducted a lengthy and flagrant affair with the latter's wife. After a few quick passes the duke dispatched the earl, received a royal pardon soon afterward, and brought Lady Shrewsbury home to live with him shortly after. Perhaps that lesson was not lost on Capt. Frederick Johnstone, whose wife, Elizabeth, divorced him and married his close friend Lord Cardigan in 1823, after the two had had an affair. Surprised that he did not receive a challenge, Cardigan sent a message to the captain, reading: "Sir: Having done you the greatest injury that one man can do another, I think it incumbent upon me to offer you the satisfaction which one gentleman owes another in such circumstances."

Johnstone said to the messenger, "Tell Lord Brudenell that he has already given me satisfaction: the satisfaction of having removed the most damned bad-tempered and extravagant bitch in the kingdom."[29]

THE LEGALITY, PREVALENCE, AND RISKS OF DUELING

Dueling was illegal through most of its history, but the laws were of little consequence. If word got out of a prospective duel, authorities might bind the principals over to keep the peace; if they were caught in the act, they might face charges. If a duel went off as planned and one or both principals were wounded, the law was not involved, since no gentleman would press charges in such a case. But if a man killed his opponent criminal charges might be brought; to avoid that prospect meetings were often arranged in a neighboring country (in Europe) or across state lines (in the United States). However, duelists were rarely convicted of murder as long as the duel had been conducted fairly. Attorneys, jurors, and judges were likely to be duelists themselves or at least sympathetic to the practice. Dueling was a privilege of members of the ruling class, who saw themselves as arbiters of the law, not subject to it. Moreover, most gentlemen would not have conceded that killing a man in a duel could be considered murder. What would be a crime for a commoner was excused when it was committed by a man obeying the mandate of his own highly polished sensibilities and the irresistible pressure of his class. He was regarded, quite literally, as a "victim of society."

Starting in the late 18th century, codes were published that gave step-by-step rules for managing an affair. The most famous were Ireland's "36 Commandments" (1777), France's *Essai sur le duel* (1836), and America's *The Code of Honor* (1838). Though never officially endorsed, they took on a quasi-legal status and were often quoted in court cases. Alexandre Dumas repeatedly referred to the *Essai sur le duel* when he was testifying as an expert witness at a dueling trial; finally, the exasperated judge, disclaiming all knowledge of this document, asked him where it might be found. "Why, in any gentleman's library," replied Dumas, with some surprise.[30]

Dueling waxed and waned in different countries over four centuries and was common enough to have involved numerous historical figures, to have been frequently denounced in sermons and editorials, and to have been legislated against with some regularity. Still, it is hard to get a handle on how common it was. Two statistics that are often bandied about are that between 1589 and 1607 more than 4,000 French noblemen were killed in duels (which is probably an exaggeration)[31] and that 172 duels were fought in England during the 60-year reign of George III (which is probably an underestimate).[32] Harriet Martineau wrote: "It is understood that in New Orleans there were fought, in 1834, more duels than there are days in the year—fifteen on one Sunday morning."[33] Criminal statistics for Germany show 2,111 prosecutions for dueling between 1882 and 1912.[34] A computerized search of the London *Times* between 1790 and 1920 turns up more than 2,000 articles on duels, but we can only imagine how many duels went unreported. Furthermore, the *Times*' coverage was largely confined to the British Isles, France, and America, while dueling was also practiced throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean countries, the European colonies, and Latin America.

The risks involved in dueling varied over time. Early sword duels were almost always fought until death or serious injury, while in the well-regulated affairs of the late-19th century a mortal wound was almost unheard of. According to an article on French duels published in 1897, "In some 1,200 duels fought between civilians during the last 20 years, only a dozen combatants were killed; the same percentage were injured, while the remaining 98 percent left the field unscathed."[35] Similar percentages held for Italy: out of 3,660 sword duels recorded in Italy between 1879 and 1899, only 20 fatalities resulted.[36] As for pistol duels, one authority, writing in 1836, claimed that in 200 English duels he had studied, only one shot in six resulted in a wound and one out of 14 in death.[37] Studying contemporary accounts in Irish newspapers, James Kelly found that of 306 duels between 1771 and 1790, 95 percent were fought with the pistol, and of the 612 persons involved, 65 were killed and 134 injured. Thus, in this period there existed about a 10 percent risk of death and a 22 percent risk of injury in a pistol duel.[38]

JUSTIFICATION OF THE DUEL

There was always legal and religious opposition to the duel, but its apologists defended it as a necessary evil, the only recourse for a man whose honor had been injured. The court system could offer a gentleman no real satisfaction; "the sting that a slap produces on the cheek of an honest man cannot be removed by a few months in jail or handful of gold," wrote a Uruguayan representative.[39] Moreover, as a French politician declared, "there is a multitude of offences which legal justice does not punish, and amongst these offences there are some so indefinable, or concerned with matters so delicate, that the injured party would blush to bring them out into broad daylight in order to demand public justice."[40]

The duel, on the other hand, restored a man's reputation by demonstrating that he valued his honor more than his life and often brought about real reconciliation between the parties. It was said to be one of the bulwarks of a polite society, without which scoundrels, blackguards, and calumniators would run rampant. Absent the duel, satisfaction would be taken through the rencontre or, worse, secret assassinations and feuds that could go on for generations. For centuries, an occasional death in a duel was held, by the weight of public opinion, to be one of the prices society paid for civilization.

NOTES

1. Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," 21. Social anthropologist Pitt-Rivers (1919–2001) was the foremost analyst of the nature of honor.
2. It should be noted that this pertained only in the peer group; the gentleman was notorious for ignoring the bills of his tailor while honoring his gambling debts. It also bears noting that as long as he maintained his reputation for courage and honesty, the gentleman had considerable latitude to indulge his vices. Of the seven deadly sins, honor was indifferent to gluttony, lust, greed, and sloth, while it positively demanded envy, pride, and wrath.
3. Bernard Mandeville, *Origin of Honour*, 15.
4. Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," 24.
5. C. Stein, "Dueling in France," *Baily's* 80 (September 1903): 170.
6. Sterling Heilig, "How to Fight a Duel," 296.
7. Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions*, 686.
8. Minnie Walter Myers, *Romance and Realism of the Southern Gulf Coast* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Co., 1898): 71–72.
9. Ben Truman, *Field of Honor,* 538.
10. *The Art of Duelling*, 37.
11. Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions*, 671.
12. Douglas L. Wilson, "Lincoln's Affair of Honor," *Atlantic Monthly* 281 (February 1998): 71.
13. Henry Alexander Campbell, *Particulars Respecting the Trial, Condemnation and Execution of Major Henry Alexander Campbell* (Boston: Cushing, 1808): 25.

14. Samuel Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, 6.
15. Guy de Maupassant, *The Complete Short Stories of Guy de Maupassant* (New York: Hanover House, 1955): 909–910.
16. "The Law of Honour," *Living Age*, 29.
17. J.W. De Forest, "Chivalrous and Semi-Chivalrous Southrons," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 38 (January 1869): 194.
18. John Sheffield, *The Works of John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, Marquis of Normanby, and Duke of Buckingham* (London: John Barber, 1729) 2:10.
19. Charles Ryskamp, ed., *Boswell: The Ominous Years 1774–1776* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963): 251.
20. Williams, "The Code of Honor in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 54 (July 1953): 118.
21. Egerton Castle, "Some Historical Duels," 360.
22. James Grund, "Duelling in the United States," 207.
23. Capt. R.H. Gronow, *Days of the Dandies*, 2:27–29.
24. Walter Pollock, "An Extinct Race: The Bretteurs," 374–375.
25. Kevin McAleer, *Dueling*, 171.
26. Grund, "The Duel of the Period in France," 796.
27. Edward Herbert, *Life of Edward Lord Herbert*, 67–68.
28. Abraham Bosquet, *The Young Man of Honour's Vade-Mecum* (London: 1817): 19–20.
29. Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Reason Why* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953): 13.
30. Grund, "Duelling in the United States," 792.
31. Maximilien de Béthune, duc de Sully, *Memoirs (London: A. Millar, 1763)* 2:278.
32. Andrew Steinmetz, *Romance of Duelling*, 1:38. This statistic, computed in the 19th century by James P. Gilchrist, is undercut by contemporary newspaper articles giving the number of duels in two years alone, 1790 and 1791, as 102, of which 36 were fatal. *Times* (London), January 4, 1791, p. 2, col. 3; March 12, 1792, p. 3, cd 4.
33. Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, 3 (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837) 3:55–56.
34. Ute Frevert, *Men of Honour*, 6.
35. "How Duels Are Fought," *Chambers's Journal* 74 (August 21, 1897): 544.

36. "Duelling in Italy," *Times* (London), April 17, 1901, p. 4, col. 1.
37. *The Art of Duelling,* 33.
38. James Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour*, 120.
39. David Parker, "Law, Honor, and Impunity in Spanish America."
40. Theodore Child, "Duelling in Paris," 528–529.

Part 1

DUELING WITH THE SWORD

From the outset the duel and the rapier had a symbiotic relationship. The civilian fashion of wearing the rapier spread across Europe in the mid-16th century from Italy and Spain, along with the notion that a gentleman stood ready to defend his honor at all times.

The rapier was a one-handed sword with a slim, straight blade, usually from 39 to 45 inches long.[1] It was a civilian rather than a military weapon, admirably suited for single combat. It became immensely popular in France, throughout the Continent, and later in England, where it had to overcome a stubborn preference for the cutting sword. A Victorian sword historian, Egerton Castle, wrote:

> The rapier came in with the taste for "cavaliero" style, and may be looked upon as its fit outward symbol already in the days of Queen Mary. In Elizabeth's reign it was firmly established as your only gentlemanlike weapon. . . . The rapier, in its heyday, was certainly an admirable weapon to

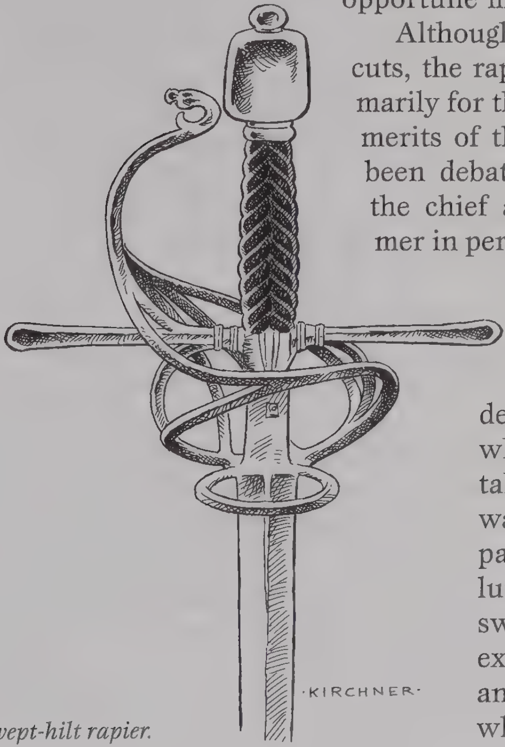
A scene from Crime Does Not Pay *(1962). Movie Still Archives.*

> look at; a delicious one to wield. And besides, in proper hands, it was undoubtedly one that was most conclusive. It was, in short, as elegant and deadly as its predecessors were sturdy and brutal.[2]

With the growing fashionability of dueling, many gentlemen sought training in fencing from recognized masters, most of whom were Italian. The master would teach them the proper stance, footwork, and positions of the hand.[3] He would teach them to attack, primarily with the point, and to defend themselves by parrying, either with their blade or a secondary weapon held in the off hand.The most popular weapon for this purpose was the dagger, a combination known as "rapier and *main gauche*." Others included a second matched rapier or a buckler, a small, round shield often equipped with a spike for offensive blows. These weapons could be used offensively as well as defensively, but there were also purely defensive techniques using a cloak or a mail-lined gauntlet. In addition to what we would consider fencing, masters taught their students a mixed bag of fighting skills, including grappling, tripping, kicking, and striking with their pommel or crossguard.

Students practiced with blunted swords and wore no protective masks, trusting in each other's skill to "spare the face." Through practice, they honed their sense of *measure* and *time*. Measure is the distance between fencers; the fencer must keep out of easy reach when on the defensive and put himself within striking distance when he delivers an attack. Time refers to the time required to perform one simple action and also to timing (i.e., performing that action at the most opportune moment).

Although capable of delivering cuts, the rapier was designed primarily for the thrust. The relative merits of thrust versus cut have been debated for centuries, but the chief advantage of the former in personal combat is that it allows an attack to be made from greater range. A thrust might be delivered with a pass, in which the swordsman takes rapid steps forward, one foot moving past the other; or a lunge, in which the swordsman fully extends his sword arm and raises his front foot while pushing forward



Swept-hilt rapier.

with the back leg. The lunge is considered the attacking stroke par excellence, offering a devastating combination of speed, power, and range. Fencing champion Aldo Nadi compared it to a cobra's strike.

The thrust was considered deadlier than the cut, since a single thrust often killed a man while multiple cuts might not. However, even a thrust through the heart or lungs did not kill a man instantly, and he might well continue fighting long enough to exact his revenge.[4] How long two desperately wounded men could fight was demonstrated in December 1610 in the rapier-and-dagger duel between Sir Hatton Cheek and Sir Thomas Dutton. As John Millingen told it:

> In the first onset Cheek ran Dutton through the throat with his dagger, close to the windpipe; when Dutton made a pass at him and ran him through the body, while he stabbed him in the back with his poniard. Although Cheek's wounds were mortal, he rushed upon his antagonist who, observing that he gradually drooped from loss of blood, merely kept on the defensive till he fell dead at his feet.[5]

Some duelists who were thrust through the body died on the spot, others survived for a month or two, and others recovered completely.

Rather than attempt to supervise the duel, the seconds often fought each other, a trend that became especially fashionable after the famous Duel of the Mignons in Paris in 1578, in which six of Henri III's favorites fought, three on a side. In multiparty duels, after a man defeated his opponent he would join with his friend or friends against the remaining foes, as described in the following English accounts:

> December 6, 1677] On Tuesday last a duel was fought between the Earl of Ossory & his second Col. Machalry against Mr. Buckley & Mr. Gerard (son of the lord of that name). The Colonel had the fortune to wound Mr. Gerard in the belly, but drawing back his sword, 'twas twirled out of his hand by his adversary, who took it up & then went to the Earl, who, finding himself set on by two, was fain [obliged] on demand to give up his sword.[6]

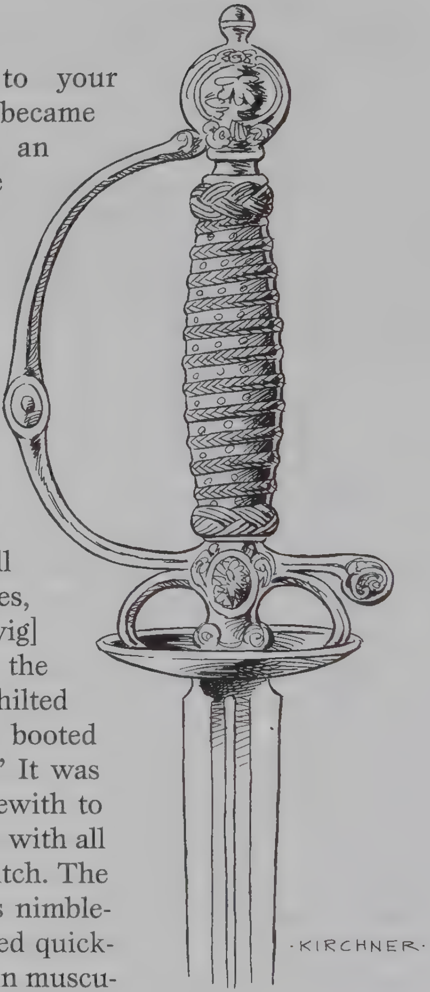
> June 5, 1682] Last Wednesday were fought two duels, viz. the Duke of Albemarle & Sir Walter Clarges against Lord Gray & Col. Godfrey. This last disarmed Sir Walter & ran to join his principal, swearing to the Duke that unless he delivered his sword he'd run him into the guts. There being no remedy, (being two to one) the Duke delivered.[7]

Such multiparty duels were common well into the 18th century.

In the last third of the 17th century, a shorter and lighter thrusting sword became fashionable. Known as the smallsword, or court sword, it had a blade about 32 to 36 inches long, with a triangular or diamond-shaped cross section, its flats often hollow ground to reduce weight while retaining rigidity. It had little cutting ability, though its edges were sometimes sharpened enough to inflict superficial wounds and to discourage an opponent from grabbing it. Its light weight and compact size made it more comfortable for daily wear than the rapier and allowed for faster handling. It was with the smallsword that the modern fencing technique was developed, in which all defensive actions are performed with the sword itself. Originating in France, the smallsword was embraced as the gentleman's side arm throughout most of Europe, though the rapier still had its loyalists in Spain and parts of Italy.

As Castle wrote:

> French fencing, to your bewigged spark, became as indispensable an accomplishment as the fine Italianated foyning had been to the Elizabethan ruffler. . . . [It was] very neat, quiet, precise, and, if anything, even more deadly than the old fence. It was perfect as a gentlemanly mode of fight . . . and as well suited to the lace ruffles, to the high perruque [wig] and the red heels of the "beau" as the long cup-hilted rapier had been to the booted and spurred "cavalier." It was an ideal weapon wherewith to decide contested points with all due decorum and dispatch. The essence of its play was nimbleness of wrist; it required quickness of spirit rather than muscular vigor.[8]



Smallsword.

Notwithstanding Castle's reference to "due decorum," the punctilios we associate with the duel were not yet widely observed, as is clear from this advice from fencing master Donald McBane in 1728:

> When you have a *Quarrel* with any Man, and have not Opportunity to Decide it immediately, don't trust him within Reach, unless others be present . . . and when you are going to Fight, or returning from it, having got the better, don't trust your Adversary behind you, nor any way within Reach, lest he give you foul Play, and Stab you for Revenge, or takes a Villainous way of getting the better of you when you are not . . . ready to Defend yourself, and during your Dispute, if it happen that you both consent to Rest to take Breath, don't quit your Sword out of your Hand, nor look from him, nor stand within his Reach, and if he Submits and offers to deliver his Sword, don't let him come near, but with the point of his Sword in his Hand, and Mounting [the hilt] presented to you. . . . Many have been deceived by not taking Care of themselves in these Cases, tho' their Adversaries have been Men of strict Honour, as they thought.[9]

The smallsword fencer did most of his parrying with his blade, but he also used his left hand to push aside his opponent's blade or to disarm him by grabbing his blade, hilt, or sword hand and gaining control of his weapon or wrenching it out of his grasp. Disarming an opponent enabled a man to end a duel without bloodshed and protected him against treacherous blows. The disarmed man was at his opponent's mercy and could be forced to admit defeat and make an apology. The Irish code stated, "In case the challenged be disarmed and refused to ask pardon or atone, he must not be *killed* as formerly; but the challenger may lay his own sword on the aggressor's shoulder, then break the aggressor's sword and say, 'I spare your life!'" It went on to suggest that if it was the challenger who was disarmed, it was considered ungenerous to break his sword.

In 1836 the Jockey Club of Paris commissioned the comte de

Chatauvillard to prepare a code of honor that would describe in detail the proper conduct of a duel. Published as *Essai sur le duel*, over the signatures of 76 notable personages, it formed the basis for the codes adopted by several other European nations. Along with the passage of stronger legal penalties for duels resulting in death, Chatauvillard's code helped transform the duel into a rather civilized affair.

In the properly regulated sword duel, the first duty of the seconds after arriving on the ground was to find a suitable area. It had to be flat and uniform, without loose pebbles, exposed tree roots, or grass that was slippery with dew. The choice of position was determined by lot.

Swords had to be of identical length and were often from a matched pair. The seconds inspected them, disallowing those with sharp edges or notches. In the late 19th century, when the cause of infection was understood, the blades were sterilized with disinfectant or flame.

Each principal stripped to his shirt to show he wore nothing that could deflect a thrust, and a refusal to do so was tantamount to a refusal to fight. Among military men it was customary to duel bare-chested.

The seconds placed the principals at their stations. According to Chatauvillard, there should be two feet between the tips of their weapons when they were *en garde*,[10] far enough apart so that a man would have a chance to defend himself against a sudden attack. Sometimes the swords were crossed at their tips, but in such cases, Burton advised, "as soon as the seconds have given the word, the pupil must learn, by a sudden and rapid movement, to break backwards one or two measures, so as to guard himself against a possible surprise."[11]

Before the duel started, the terms would be read aloud by the *juge de camp*, a sort of umpire who might be one of the seconds or an independent third party. The juge de camp would ask each combatant if he was ready and, after responses in the affirmative, would command, "*Allez, messieurs!*" (Start, gentlemen!)

The seconds stood by closely during the fight, holding stout canes. In the event that a combatant slipped, stumbled, was disarmed or wounded, or had his weapon bend or break, the seconds would shout, "Halt!" while pushing up the swords with their canes. In later years the duel would also be halted if a blade touched the ground so that it could be resterilized. A high level of alertness was required of the seconds, for a duel could quickly get out of hand. In a rapid exchange of thrusts, a combatant might be wounded without realizing it or might continue to attack a helpless opponent either intentionally or unintentionally.

The grappling so typical of earlier duels was forbidden. Chatauvillard forbade using the left hand to grab an opponent's hand, body, or blade. Now the only way a man could disarm his opponent was with a sword technique, such as a beat, a glissade, or an envelopment,[12] and there was no longer any advantage in doing so, because the seconds would merely call a halt and return the sword to the man who had dropped it. Nevertheless, to be disarmed was humiliating. The possibility so concerned Benito Mussolini that before his duels he reportedly coated the palm of his fencing glove with pitch.[13]

It was no longer permissible to use the left hand to parry unless it had been agreed upon beforehand, and Chatauvillard recommended that a man who persisted in it have his hand tied behind his back. In 1862, Baron César de Bazancourt decried it as "foreign to all recognized practice" and warned that it could easily lead to grabbing the blade itself.[14] Writing in 1880, Sir Richard Francis Burton agreed, mentioning that he once employed "this Italian style of parry" when fencing a friend and that the friend observed "I see no reason, when you use your left hand in that way, why I should not come down upon your head with the pommel of my sword!"[15] There were several duels in the late 19th century in which a man killed or wounded his opponent after employing a left-handed parry and was widely considered to have disgraced himself.[16]

The duel would be fought through a series of timed bouts, separated by rest periods as agreed beforehand. Rarely would it end before a wound was inflicted. Blood was the sacred fluid of honor; it alone could wipe stains from a man's reputation, and the spilling of at least a few drops was considered necessary to achieve satisfaction.

Though the phrase "dueling to first blood" is encountered as far back as the 16th century, it is hard to find a19th-century *procès-verbal* stating that a duel was ended on that basis, as it suggested a lack of seriousness. Generally, it declared that a duel ended because a wound or wounds had put one man "in a state of inferiority," and, understandably, no honorable man would fight an opponent who could no longer adequately defend himself. In a further face-saving gesture, it would be reported that the wounded man demanded to be allowed to continue, but his entreaties were refused by the seconds, in consultation with the surgeons.

From fencing's earliest days, the prospective duelist often sought some trick that would guarantee his victory: the "secret thrust," which no opponent could parry. If the fencing master were truthful, he would tell those who asked that the only secrets of fencing are "dexterity, rapidity, and precision, acquired by patience, perseverance, and thought."[17] But for those eager to pay a premium, masters often kept something suitable in reserve. And, as Castle wrote, "constant practice at one particular trick, especially with the long rapier, which required a great deal of muscular strength, might render any peculiarly fierce, sudden, and audacious stroke excessively dangerous to one who did not happen to have seen the trick before."[18]

According to Burton, most so-called secret thrusts were mere irregularities of technique that might succeed by surprise. For example, a fencer suddenly bends almost to the ground, supported on his left hand, and thrusts at his opponent beneath his guard. Or a fencer attacks and then suddenly withdraws his sword as his opponent parries, leaps to the side, and thrusts him in the flank. Or, after beating down his opponent's sword, makes a *demi-volte*[19] to the front and, before his opponent can spring backward or recover his guard, raises his hand and thrusts downward in an *imbroccata*. The problem with these moves, Burton wrote, is their all-or-nothing quality: if they don't succeed, they expose the attacker in such a way that he cannot defend himself.

Although Burton discounted the notion of a secret thrust, he did allow that he had his own favorite move, which "has more than once done me good service." When asked to demonstrate it, he heartily declined. No doubt he would have agreed with French swordsman Aurélien Scholl that a man must not demonstrate everything in the fencing room that he can do on the dueling field.[20]

There were still a few "secrets" available to desperate duelists. Parisian journalist Adolphe Possein is said to have triumphed in several duels by jumping the gun. When the director of combat ordered, "Allez, messieurs," he attacked like a flash between "allez" and "messieurs." Another trick was called the *coup-du-gendarme*: the swordsman, once engaged, would look over his opponent's shoulder and shout, "Look out—the police!" and when his opponent turned, give him a thrust.[21]

Wearing a sword fell out of fashion in the last quarter of the 18th century, except for military officers in full dress. Gentlemen took to carrying walking sticks to defend themselves on the street, and canes figured in many of the impromptu scuffles that led to duels.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the ability to fence was not as common among the English as among their Continental peers, placing them at a distinct disadvantage in a fight. Nevertheless, we read of men who had never before picked up a sword defeating experienced fencers, and not only in the adventure stories of Charles Lever and Captain Marryat, but in accounts purporting to be factual. Burton observed that in a duel, "a single home thrust only is wanted, no matter how, no matter where, rightly or wrongly delivered. Here, do not forget it, in addition to stratagem, address, and science, there are other and unknown factors—surprise, brutal strength, savage ferocity, and the furious onslaughts of ignorance. . . . Many men attend the schools for years and never take the trouble of trying the experiment how they would act if opposed to a vigorous and resolute man who has never had a sword in hand. The attack—I would call it the wild-beast style . . . may sometimes succeed by chance."[22]

Thus, the inexperienced man was often advised not to bother taking a few hasty lessons under the theory that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing and that in the absence of adequate training he was better off trusting to animal instinct.

The Art of Duelling gave an account of one such encounter:

> While living on the Continent I witnessed several duels with the small sword. I remember, upon one occasion, an affair between a young officer who was unquestionably a first-rate foil player and another who had been little accustomed to handle the weapon. I felt confident, when informed what was to take place, that the inferior player would be run through the body in a few minutes. He was, however, a hardy, active, thickset youth, with the eye of a hawk, and the nerve of a lion. Although aware of the decided odds against him, he stood before his antagonist's blade without flinching, or moving a muscle, seemingly determined, as his mind was made up to die, to sell his life as dearly as possible. He commenced by making several furious and random thrusts. Had foils instead of swords been in their hands, he would have felt his adversary's point against his breast half a dozen times. But I saw the fearful appearance of a sharp,

> polished blade moving so rapidly within a few inches of the breast was not quite so agreeable to the first-rate player as the foil, his usual weapon: and, in fact, he appeared half paralyzed.
>
> I mention this affair to show that something more than skill is necessary when using a naked weapon, or shotted pistol: and the most able fencer, or the first-rate shot, are not always the best men in the field.[23]

Burton agreed that even an untrained man always had a sporting chance: "The greatest skill in arms does not make the fencer invulnerable. . . . Even the feeblest find unforeseen chances of escape, protecting hazards, [and] strokes of luck, which prevent the combat degenerating into manslaughter." There is a strong element of wishful thinking here, of course. In the vast majority of such encounters, the untrained man was as handily dispatched as Mr. Dillon was by the duc de Gramont-Caderousse, in the case covered later in this volume.

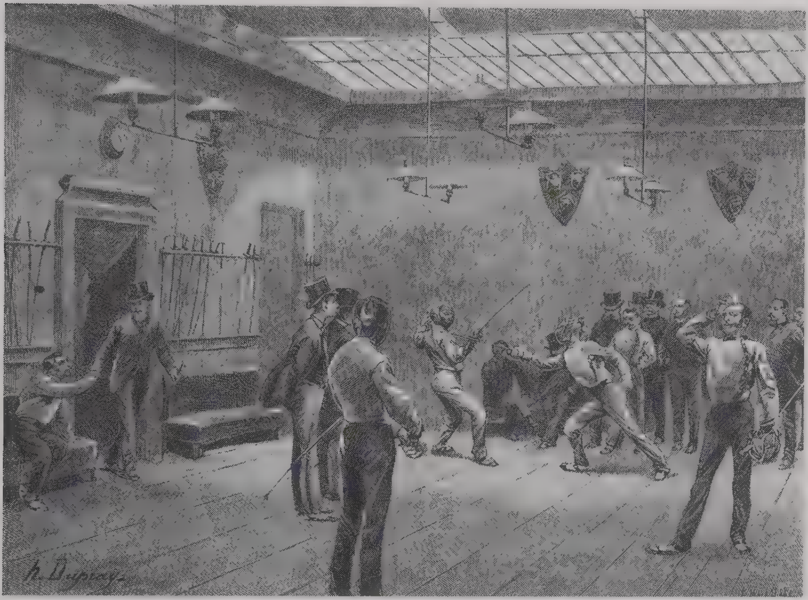
For the most part, 19th-century men no longer "fenced in play as they did in earnest."[24] Protective masks were worn and practice was conducted with the light, whippy foil, which had a padded, or "buttoned," tip. Points were awarded only for thrusts to the torso, and rules such as the "right of way" gave points only to hits that had been properly prepared. The left arm was kept behind the back and used only for balance. Fencing became more of a sport than a martial art.

The lightning-fast movements of the foil were not possible with the heavier and stiffer *épée de combat*, or dueling sword, and the attacks typical of sport fencing were not advisable when fighting for real, so that when a man had an appointment on the field, he often took a few preparatory *leçons de duel* to familiarize himself with the épée and learn some appropriate techniques. Pioneered by Parisian fencing master Jules Jacob, these lessons came to stress extending the sword arm, striking at an opponent's hand and arm, and back-stepping rather than parrying. This not only enabled an unschooled fencer to defend himself reasonably well, but minimized the likelihood of serious injuries. In a letter published in the *Times* in 1878, a correspondent signing himself "Swordsman" contemptuously dismissed the trend:

> In three lessons of an hour each the fencing master will teach his pupil to encounter the most expert swordsman and with the smallest possible risk. It is a question, in military parlance, of judging distance, and he inculcates the necessity of never allowing any part of the person to come within reach of the rapier[25] point, except the arm. This is done by stepping back one pace as soon as the swords are delivered by the seconds, and keeping that distance throughout. If A advances, B steps back one pace after having thrust at his adversary's arm; if he misses, he steps back another pace to escape a return thrust. Then B tries his luck at the same game. At the first scratch the seconds interfere. This explains how annually over 100 duels are fought with swords without any proving fatal.[26]

Another expert commented with some exasperation, "A student of three lessons, who knew no more than I am telling you, actually forced a celebrated fencer to imitate the same tactics in order to come off without loss of credit." As a further example, he described the duel between veteran duelist comte de Dion and novice Gérault-Richard, which lasted 10 rounds, and "in the end de Dion had to pink him in the arm to get away to lunch."[27]

In the last quarter of the 19th century, in a backlash against the artificiality of foil fencing, épée training became a sport in itself. It more realistically simulated the duel by including the entire body as a target, and using a button-tip version of the



Parisian salle d'armes *in the 1880s.*

épée de combat for training. Its blade was about 35 inches long, about half again as heavy as the foil. It had a triangular cross section, no cutting edge, and was fitted with a large bowl guard to cover the vulnerable hand and arm. Around the time that the épée became popular, the Italians introduced a sporting style of saber using straight or slightly curved blades that were lighter than those typical of the military. Saber fencing allowed cuts as well as thrusts, with the target area everything above the waist. For dueling, the blade was sharpened along its leading (or "true") edge and for eight inches or so along the back (or "false") edge.

With the extremities now the primary target, there was no longer much risk in a well-supervised sword duel. As one journalist observed, "It is no longer regarded as a proof of good swordsmanship, but quite the reverse, for a duellist to give his opponent a fatal wound."[28] This point was underscored in a 1903 exhibition described in the *New York Tribune*:

> A novel encounter in which eight men fought with dueling swords without buttons under the same conditions as prevail in actual duels, and in which four of the combatants were slightly wounded, took place this afternoon in a private enclosure at Neuilly, a northwestern suburb of Paris, in the presence of 150 persons. . . . The organizers of the encounter declare that the object was to demonstrate the harmlessness of duels as they are generally fought.[29]

In those countries where the *arme blanche* remained the preferred weapon, such as France, Italy, Argentina, and Austria-Hungary, dueling continued well into the 20th century, largely because there seemed to be no pressing need to restrain it. Outside of a few *Mensuren* (stylized university student duels) gone wrong, the last fatal sword duel that this author has found an account of was between two deputies in the Hungarian parliament, Count Stefan Keglivich, 67, and Dr. Hencz, 27, on May 29, 1905. In the second round the count, making an energetic attack, literally ran into Hencz's saber, the point coming out his back. He died almost instantly, and it was subsequently rumored that he had chosen to commit suicide in this way.[30] The incident was a shocking anomaly. Though for centuries the duel with the sword was regarded as more dangerous than that with the pistol, it had become, for the most part, a harmless exercise.

NOTES

1. But occasionally as short as 34 inches or as long as 53 inches.
2. Castle, "Swordsmanship Considered Historically," 801.
3. Most of the accounts in this volume use the later French terms for the

positions of the hand: *prime*, *seconde*, *tierce*, *quarte*, etc.

4. For a thorough examination of the effects of sword wounds, see Frank Lurz, "The Dubious Quick Kill," an online article at http://classicalfencing.com.
5. John Millingen, *History of Duelling*, 2:12.
6. Thomas De Longueville, *Pryings Among the Private Papers*, 145.
7. Ibid., 146.
8. Castle, "Fencing Considered Historically," 805. Castle is correct that fashion greatly influenced the evolution of the sword, but his assertion that the smallsword was more deadly than the rapier is dubious at best, reflecting the view, typical of Victorian scholars, that fencing evolved steadily through the ages to reach its perfected form in their time.
9. Donald McBane, *Expert Swordsman's Companion*, 29.
10. En garde, or on guard, is a position of defensive and offensive readiness.
11. Richard Burton, *The Sentiment of the Sword*, chapt. 9, pt. 5.
12. Beat: a blow against an opponent's blade. Glissade: a flowing attack on an opponent's blade, forcing it out of line by gliding one's own blade against it from the *foible* (the half to two-thirds of the blade nearer the tip) to the *forte* (the part nearer the hilt). Envelopment: an attack in which one takes control of the foible of the opponent's blade, making a complete circle with one's sword while maintaining contact throughout.
13. Richard Collier, *Duce! A Biography of Benito Mussolini* (New York: Viking Press, 1971): 57.
14. César de Bazancourt, *Secrets of the Sword,* 163–170.
15. Burton, *The Sentiment of the Sword*, ch. 8, pt. 6.
16. Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor*, 203, 207, 288, n. 138.
17. "French Duels," 550.
18. Castle, "Swordsmanship Considered Historically," 802.
19. Demi-volte: a way of turning the body out of the line of attack by swinging the rear foot behind and generally to the right in a circular half pace.
20. "Parisian Swordsmen," *The Saturday Review* 53 (June 24, 1882): 804.
21. "French Duels," 550.
22. Burton, *The Sentiment of the Sword*, chapt. 7, pt. 6.
23. *The Art of Duelling*, 30.
24. Castle, "Swordsmanship Considered Historically," 807.

25. The term “rapier” is often used generically to refer to various types of thrusting swords.
26. “Duelling in France,” *Times* (London), December 4, 1878, p. 8, col. 4.
27. Sterling Heilig, “How to Fight a Duel,” *Idler: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 23 (1903): 294.
28. “Recent French Incidents,” *Times* (London), September 7, 1882, p. 7, col. 1.
29. “An Object Lesson in Dueling,” *New York Tribune*, March 16, 1903, p. 2, col. 3.
30. “Dueling in Hungary Is Mostly a Farce,” *New York Times,* Sunday, November 29, 1936, sect. 4, p. 4, col. 5; “Fatal Duel in Hungary,” *Daily Telegraph*, May 30, 1905, p. 10, col. 5.

1

SEIGNEUR DE JARNAC VS. SEIGNEUR DE LA CHÂTAIGNERAIE

JULY 10, 1547

The duel between Guy de Chabot, seigneur de Jarnac, and François de Vivonne, seigneur de La Châtaigneraie, was one of the last judicial duels in France, and it initiated the fashion for duels of honor.

As a boy La Châtaigneraie served as a page to François I, who often referred to him as "*mon filleul*" (my godson), and he ingratiated himself with the *dauphin* (the heir to the throne), Henri II. As a young man La Châtaigneraie was fond of all martial arts. He had studied fencing in Rome under the celebrated master Patenostrier and in Milan under Tappe, and was considered one of the best swordsmen of his time. With his powerful build, he also excelled as a wrestler and won several duels by closing with his opponent, wrestling him to the ground, and finishing him off with his dagger. He served with distinction in wars in Italy and the Netherlands, and was generally regarded as brave and openhearted but prone to excessive pride and bragging. At the time of the duel he was about 26 years old.

His fellow courtier Jarnac was also a favorite of François. He was a good soldier, but with nothing like La Châtaigneraie's reputation for prowess. He was 10 years older, taller but not as strong, and more reserved and pious by nature. His family was not nearly as wealthy as La Châtaigneraie's, but after the death of Jarnac's mother his father had married a rich and beautiful gentlewoman, who provided Jarnac with a generous allowance.

Jarnac's finances were a source of curiosity at court, and in 1545 the dauphin asked him how he maintained such a good show when it was well known that his family's estate was modest. Jarnac explained the source of his funds, but gossip soon spread that Jarnac was having sex with his stepmother in return for his allowance. Mortified, Jarnac declared that whoever had said such a thing was "a malicious villain and had wickedly lied."

The rumor is believed to have originated with either the dauphin or his wife, which created an awkward situation. Due to his position, the dauphin could hardly duel Jarnac himself. La Châtaigneraie, who had long been a friend of Jarnac's, saw an opportunity to advance himself at court by claiming responsibility for the rumor, and he went so far as to insist that Jarnac had told him privately that it was true.

It was in the interest of both men to resolve the matter in as public a manner as possible, and they applied to François I for permission to fight a judicial duel, a procedure that had fallen out of common use but remained a legal option. However, the king not only refused, but forbade the two men from fighting at all and threatened them with severe punishment should they defy him.

François died in the spring of 1547, and as soon as Henri II ascended the throne the two courtiers appealed to him for permission to fight. He granted it "for the verification of their honor," the duel to be held in a little over a month's time. It was popularly assumed that La Châtaigneraie would win easily; he was said to fear his opponent "no more than a lion does a dog." Jarnac was determined to get every edge he could, however, and spent the month before the duel attending daily mass and training with the Italian fencing master Caize (sometimes spelled Caiza or Caizo).

As the challenged party, Jarnac had the choice of arms and of whether to fight on horseback or on foot. As the challenger, La Châtaigneraie was bound to accept Jarnac's terms unless the judges of the combat upheld his objections.

Jarnac's first thought was to fight on horseback, and he sent his opponent a long list of the types of horses, saddles, weapons, and armor that would be required, leading La Châtaigneraie to protest, "This man wants to try both my valor and my purse." However, on the advice of Caize, Jarnac finally decided to fight on foot. Each would be armed with a long, heavy, double-edged sword of an older style. Each man would have an extra sword in reserve in case his blade broke and would also be armed with two daggers: a long one strapped to his right thigh and a short one placed in his left boot. He would carry a large shield, wear a morion (an open helmet with a brim and crest), a corselet (body armor covering the chest and hips), iron gauntlets, and a special brassard (armor for the right arm). This last item was the most remarkable: it was sometimes described as having very stiff hinges, limiting the movement of the arm, and sometimes as having no hinges at all, holding the arm rigid.

Each of these specifications was calculated to favor Jarnac. He specified large shields, on the assumption that he would be on the defensive for most of the fight, and the two daggers so that he would be able to reach one even if he was disarmed and thrown to the ground. In a recent military campaign La Châtaigneraie had been wounded in the right arm and had not fully recovered, so the heavy sword and gauntlets were intended to sap his energy. Mainly, though, the stiff brassard would keep him from wrapping his arms around his opponent.

The duel was held on July 10 at a field near the chateau at Saint Germain-en-Laye, in a 24-by-40-yard space enclosed with a double barricade. The king and his court watched from stands at the center, and a large crowd of commoners was in attendance, many of them rabble from Paris who had to be forcibly restrained from pushing through the barriers. At the far ends of the field each of the principals had a commodious tent. In his, La Châtaigneraie had tables set up and a sumptuous feast laid out on fine silver for the celebration of the victory he was confident would be his.

To begin the formalities, La Châtaigneraie presented himself to the king, paraded ceremonially around the perimeter of the field with his retinue, hung his family arms on a post to the king's right, and retired to his tent. Jarnac then did the same, hanging his family arms to the king's left.

Jarnac sent his squire to La Châtaigneraie's pavilion with the arms and armor that would be used in the bout. La Châtaigneraie's seconds readily acceded to everything but the brassard. After a long and heated discussion, the matter was submitted to the judges for resolution. They ruled for Jarnac. It is said that La Châtaigneraie, in pain as Jarnac's squire fixed the brassard on his right arm, swore that he would make him pay. "When you have done your fight with my master," responded the squire, "I shall have little fear of your worship."

At 7 P.M., the two men walked into the arena. Each in turn walked up to the priest stationed before the king and swore that his cause was a just one and that he and his weapons were under the protection of no magical spells. The herald then declared that the fight should begin.

La Châtaigneraie walked quickly and aggressively toward Jarnac, holding his sword high, ready to strike. Jarnac advanced slowly and cautiously, behind his shield, his sword held as if to parry. As soon as they were within measure, La Châtaigneraie aimed a cut at Jarnac's head. Jarnac took the blow on his shield, stooped down, and landed a thrust at the hollow of La Châtaigneraie's left knee. Before La Châtaigneraie could recover, Jarnac severed his hamstring with a draw cut delivered with the false edge.[1] This was the maneuver that he had been practicing under Caize for the month leading up to the combat. It came to be known as the *coup-de-Jarnac*, which originally referred to an unexpected and effective blow but came to imply underhandedness.[2]

La Châtaigneraie staggered, dropped his sword, and sank to the ground. The crowd roared in astonishment to see the great swordsmen dispatched so quickly and then fell silent in anticipation.

The victor in a judicial duel could deal with the vanquished in one of three ways: he could kill him, after which the executioner would hang his corpse on a gibbet to dishonor it; he could spare his life in return for a confession that his accusation had been false; or he could deliver him to the king, who would restore the victor's honor while pardoning or punishing the vanquished as he saw fit.

Jarnac asked La Châtaigneraie to confess his lie, but he would not and tried desperately to get back on his feet and continue the fight.

Jarnac saluted the king with his bloody sword, knelt before him, and said, "Sire, I entreat you to esteem me a man of honor; I give La Châtaigneraie to you. It is our youth alone which is the cause of all this. Let no imputation, Sire, rest either on his family or upon him on account of his offense, for I surrender him to you."

The king, reluctant to accept the duel's outcome, sat silent and stone-faced.

Jarnac turned again to La Châtaigneraie and entreated him to yield, but instead the latter, having regained his sword, with a supreme effort raised himself onto one knee and tried to throw himself at his foe. Jarnac stepped back and, raising his sword, said, "Do not budge, Vivonne, or I shall kill you."

"Kill me, then!" roared La Châtaigneraie, falling back on the ground. With the point of his sword, Jarnac drew La Châtaigneraie's sword out of his reach, along with one of the daggers that had fallen out of its sheath. He delivered these weapons to the heralds and again beseeched the king to proclaim his honor.

As the king remained obdurate, the situation was deadlocked for some moments. One of the judges pointed out to the king that La Châtaigneraie was seriously wounded, and were he to die on the field, Jarnac would be obliged to drag away his corpse and deliver it to the executioner for hanging. Realizing that his continued refusal to accept the defeat of his champion might lead to even greater disgrace, the king relented, saying coldly, "You have done your duty, Jarnac, and your honor ought to be restored to you."

The judge announced that it was the right of the victor to be escorted from the field by his followers, preceded by heralds, to the sound of drums and blowing trumpets. Jarnac knew that this was no time for triumphal displays, however, and declined, saying to the king, "To belong to you is all I desire."

The king then embraced him and declared, "You have fought like Caesar and spoken like Aristotle."

La Châtaigneraie was carried off the field, and his wounds were bandaged. He might have recovered, but so chagrined was he at his defeat that he tore off his dressings and bled to death. He is said to have refused the ministrations of a priest and to have died blaspheming. As for his victory banquet, it was devoured by the Parisian rabble that rushed his tent and had to be dispersed by halberd-wielding guardsmen. The extensive dinner service and silver plate, borrowed from seven or eight noble families, disappeared in the confusion.

Henri II swore that he would never again sanction a trial by combat. However, he only succeeded in driving the practice underground, as the celebrated fight inspired a mania for dueling among the nobility.

The death of his favorite was considered an inauspicious start to Henri's reign. There were others as well, such as a verse in Nostradamus's *Centuries* (1555) that predicted his early demise. Also, while François I was still alive, Luc Gauier, the astrologer of the Medicis, had predicted that his successor's reign would begin and end with a duel. After the duel of Jarnac and La Châtaigneraie, Catherine de Medici had Gauier do a special reading, and he divined that Henri II would die in single combat in his 41st year. His majesty dismissed the prophesy, as someone of his rank did not duel; moreover, as he said, "it does not bother me to die at the hand of someone provided he be brave and valiant and that *gloire* remain to me."

In June 1559, Henri sponsored a tournament as part of the celebration of his daughter's wedding. He was an enthusiastic jouster and even at 40 cut an imposing figure on horseback. He was adjudged the victor in his first two bouts. In the third, he and his opponent, Capt. Gabriel de Montgommery of the Scottish Guards, shivered their lances against each other's breastplates. Montgommery held onto his stump rather than dropping it immediately, and it glanced up and hit Henri's visor, which, not having been properly fastened, opened under the impact. Splinters were thrust into the king's brain. He died on July 9, almost 12 years to the day after the duel of Jarnac and La Châtaigneraie.

NOTES

1. The false edge is the back edge, or the edge away from the knuckles.
2. This account is drawn from H. Noel Williams, *Henry II: His Court and Times* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1910) and Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Henry II: King of France 1547–1559* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988). Slightly different versions are presented by Richard Burton and Egerton Castle.

   Burton, in *The Sentiment of the Sword,* ch. 7, pt. 5 says: "A certain Chabot de Jarnac and Vivonne de la Châtaigneraie, a noted duellist, having quarrelled about a certain fair person, fought with sword and shield *en champ clos* before Henri II and the ladies of the Court (July 10, 1547). Vivonne made an *imbroccata*, or binding of the sword, with thrust from high to low line. Jarnac, a man of humble birth, who had taken lessons from an Italian, got within measure and delivered two hamstringing cuts (*fendente al poplite*) right and left, and his opponent died of rage within two hours. The King, furious at the loss of a favourite, called it a *coup de traître*. He was followed by his courtiers, and the expression has passed into everyday use. But Marozzo (Chapter 85) had described the pass as *un reviscio segato per le gambe*, and in this very duel it was provided for and foreseen—the seconds had settled that a dagger was to be carried by way of guard in the left *borzacchino* (jack-boot)."

Castle in "Some Historic Duels," 183–184, says: "La Chasteineraye [*sic*] came out of his tent as though in a fury, with unequal step and disordered mien. Jarnac, on the contrary, came up more coolly to the fight. It was then that one of the spectators (who proved to be Jarnac's master of fence) was heard to say that shortly would be seen some hamstringing; as indeed came to be the case, for, after a few thrusts and strokes dealt on either side, Jarnac making feint of striking his adversary on the outside of the advanced leg, drew a reverse cut at the inside of the knee with the false edge so effectively that la Chasteineraye fell down forthwith."

For a detailed technical analysis, see John Clements' "Duel of the Century: The Judicial Combat of Jarnac and Châtaigneraye" at www.thearma.org/essays/DOTC.htm.

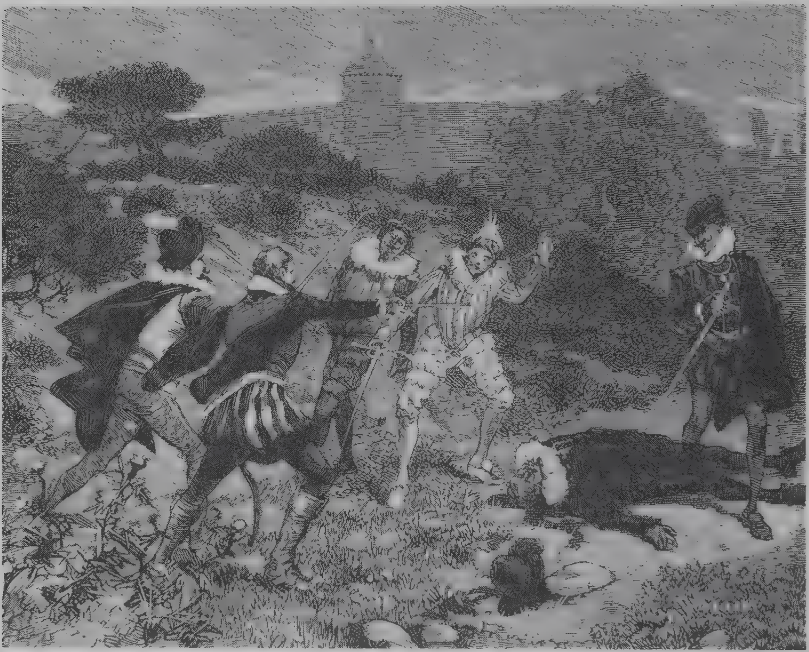
2

DUEL OF THE MIGNONS

APRIL 27, 1578

French King Henri III, a homosexual, surrounded himself with a group of companions known as the *mignons* (darlings). According to a contemporary chronicle:

> The mignons] are much hated and scorned by the people, as much for their haughty manners as for their effeminate and immodest appearance, but most of all for the excessive liberalities of the King toward them. Popular opinion holds that this is the cause of [the people's] ruin. . . . These fine mignons wear their hair long and curled artificially, on top of [which they wear] little velvet bonnets like those of the girls in the brothels; their shirts are long and loose, so that their heads look like St. John's on the platter. . . . Their occupations are gambling, blaspheming, jumping, dancing, quarreling, fornicating, and following the King around. They do everything to please him, giving no thought to honor or to God, contenting themselves with the grace of their master.[1]



New York Public Library Picture Collection.

Feuds within the court of Henri III were pursued with violent abandon. On January 10, 1578, Henri addressed a large number of lords and gentlemen on the subject of the almost daily quarrels and duels, which he said displeased him. A few days later he printed and circulated a number of regulations that he insisted he would enforce, but he was not taken seriously. Dueling was already a capital offense, but the law was toothless.

On the evening of April 26, Jacques de Quélus began fighting with one of his fellow mignons, Charles de Balzac d'Entragues at the Louvre (then the royal palace), and they had to be separated by friends. "I'll have your life for this!" cried Quélus, in a rage.

"Well then, sir—to Tournelles, at once," responded d'Entragues.

Arrangements were quickly made for a meeting before dawn at the Parc des Tournelles, with other mignons serving as seconds: Ribérac and Schomberg for Quélus, Maugérin and Livarot for d'Entragues. The ensuing fight was witnessed by some of the vagrants who lived nearby.

As they arrived at the ground, Quélus observed to d'Entragues, "You have both a sword and a dagger while I have only a sword."

To which d'Entragues replied, "The more your folly to leave your dagger at home. We came here to fight, not to adjust weapons."

They began fighting, and Quélus was forced to parry d'Entragues' sword with his left hand.

As they watched, Ribérac said to Maugérin, "I think we ought to reconcile these gentlemen, rather than let them kill each other."

To which Maugérin replied, "Sir, I have not come here to string pearls, but to fight."

"To fight? With whom? The quarrel does not concern you."

"With you, sir?" suggested Maugérin.

Bounding upon his opponent, Ribérac thrust him through the body, but Maugérin held his point in line and Ribérac was impaled upon it by the force of his own lunge.

"Shall we watch our valiant friends kill each other without crossing swords ourselves?" Schomberg asked Livarot.

"'Twould be a disgrace to men of honor," answered Livarot, drawing his sword. Schomberg nearly cut off the whole side of Livarot's face with his first slash and was run though the body in return.

Quélus' left hand was badly cut up as he used it to parry his opponent's sword, and though he managed to wound d'Entragues slightly in the arm, he at last sank to the ground with several thrusts through the body, imploring d'Entragues to be satisfied and not finish him off.

The duel became famous as the *duel des mignons* (duel of the darlings).

Schomberg and Maugérin died on the spot, and Ribérac succumbed the following day. D'Entragues and Livarot recovered. Quélus, who had suffered 19 wounds, was given little hope. Henri III visited him daily at the mansion where he languished and remained sometimes long into the night, nursing him personally. He even decreed that the road in front of the home be closed so that Quélus would not be disturbed by traffic noise. He assigned his own physicians to care for him and promised them 100,000 crowns if Quélus recovered. This was beyond their power to effect, though, and after 33 days Quélus died. His last words, cried over and over, were not a prayer but "My king! Oh, my king!"

Henri was effusive in his grief. After a magnificent state funeral, he had a marble monument erected over the tomb of his mignons and wrote a verse honoring them:

Seigneur! reçois ent ton giron
Schomberg, Quélus et Maugiron![2]
(Lord! receive upon your lap,
Schomberg, Quélus et Maugiron!)

Even though Henri III had issued an edict against duels, and would issue another a year later, his words were undercut by his actions. The duel des mignons was considered such a handsome fight that it set a trend for multiparty duels in France and elsewhere.

Entragues had incurred the king's wrath, but he found protection with the powerful duc de Guise and lived into his mid-50s, dying in 1599.

The other survivor, Livarot, pops up again in Brantôme's chronicles. His reputation enhanced by the famous duel, he became more pugnacious than ever. At a ball at the royal chateau at Blois on the evening of May 4, 1581, he got into an argument with the marquis de Malleraye, who was paying excessive attention to Livarot's mistress. The two agreed to duel the following day on a little island in the Loire. Per agreement, neither was accompanied by a second, but brought only a lackey to hold his horse. Malleraye quickly killed Livarot, but as he was leaving the field Livarot's lackey, who had hidden a sword in the sand, stabbed him in the back. The murder was witnessed by bystanders, and the lackey was tried and hanged.[3]

Henri III's bizarre behavior throughout the affair of the mignons made him appear ridiculous to many of his subjects. He was jeered at public appearances and portrayed in pamphlets as the "Prince of Sodom." He was assassinated in 1589.

NOTES

1. Pierre de L'Estoile, *The Paris of Henry of Navarre*, Nancy Lyman Roelker, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958): 52.
2. Martha Walker Freer, *Henry III, King of France and Poland: His Court and Times* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858), 2:198.
3. George Powell, *Duelling Stories of the Sixteenth Century*, 106–107.

3

LORD EDWARD BRUCE VS. SIR EDWARD SACKVILLE, 4TH EARL OF DORSET

LATE SUMMER 1613

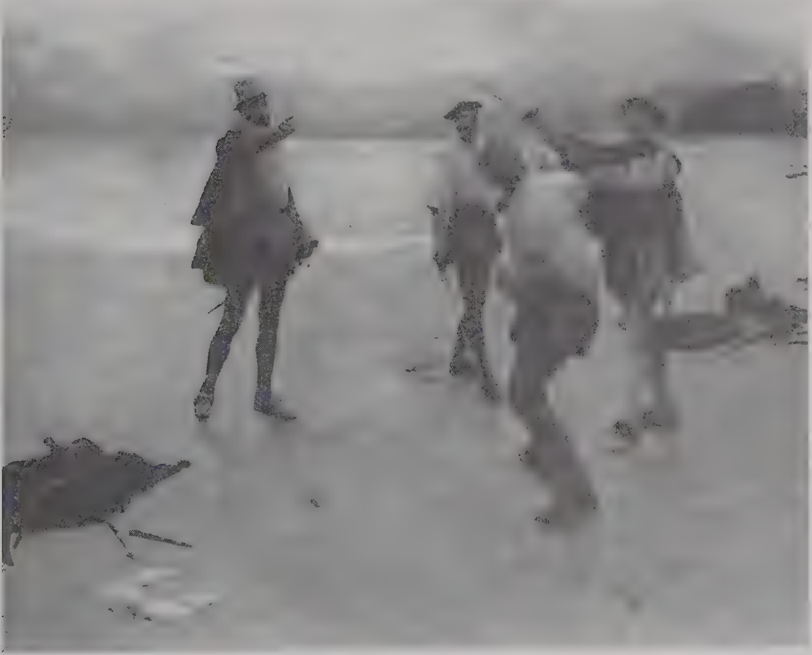
By the end of the 16th century, the fever for dueling with rapiers had spread to England, and fencing lessons in Paris became part of the young gentleman's education. Duels were often held across the Channel to avoid English law.

Lord Edward Bruce, 2nd Baron of Kinloss, and Sir Edward Sackville, later the 4th Earl of Dorset, were friends from childhood, but a conflict arose between them, as rumor has it, because Sackville seduced Bruce's sister. As early as January 1613 the gentlemen tried to get together across the Channel to fight, but James I of England (James VI of Scotland) intervened to reconcile them. In May the two men happened to meet at Canterbury, and according to a contemporary account, Bruce struck Sackville "two or three good buffets in the face . . . they were parted and made friends by the noblemen that were present. The Lord Bruce is since gone into France, I think, to learn to fence."[1]

In the summer of 1613 Bruce wrote to Sackville from Paris. Speaking of their former friendship, he said he was "confident your honour gives you the same courage to do me right that it did to do me wrong. Be master of your own weapons and time;

the place wheresoever, I will wait on you. By doing this you shall shorten revenge, and clear the idle opinion the world hath of both our worths."[2]

Their correspondence, still preserved in the library of Queen's College, Oxford, provides an account of the negotiations. The duel would be fought in Zealand, in the Netherlands, to evade the laws of England and France. Sackville would send Bruce his sword so that he could provide himself with one that matched it. It was agreed that should either party fall, the combat should cease and he who had fallen was to acknowledge that his life had been in the other's hands. In the event one man's sword should break, the other should take no advantage but either reconcile or resume the fight on even terms.



Early 17th-century English duels were often held on beaches across the Channel to avoid prosecution.

As his second, Bruce chose a Mr. Crawford, while Sackville selected Sir John Heidon. Both men also brought surgeons with them.

The parties met ashore and rode toward Bergen-op-Zoom, a small town near the border with the Spanish Netherlands (Spanish-held provinces in the southern Low Countries, roughly corresponding to modern Belgium and Luxembourg), which would facilitate a speedy flight from the law. To Sackville's surprise, Bruce suddenly announced that it would take more than a little of Sackville's blood to satisfy his honor and therefore he wished the seconds to hang back since he was afraid they might interfere. Heidon objected that such intentions were bloody and butcherly, unfitting to a nobleman who should desire to bleed for reputation not for life, and he added that he thought himself injured in being prohibited from executing those honourable offices for which he had come so far. But Bruce only repeated his request, which Sackville granted on the condition that their surgeons, who were unarmed, should accompany them. Sackville also asked for a short delay, because he had eaten a heavy dinner and knew that "the surgeons hold a wound upon a full stomach much more dangerous than otherwise." These terms having been agreed to, the men soon set out. As they rode, Sackville's anger slowly rose, "I being verily mad with anger," he later wrote, "that Lord Bruce should thirst after my life with a kind of assuredness; seeing I came so far, and needlessly, to give him leave to regain his lost reputation."[3]

After about two miles, his passion overwhelming him, Sackville asked Bruce to dismount and fight on the spot, and he agreed. They asked the surgeons to keep their distance and not intercede in the fight no matter how serious it became, "but suffer us to execute our pleasure; we being fully resolved (God forgive us) to dispatch each other by what means we could."

Sackville and Bruce took off their doublets and, ankle deep in swampy terrain, charged each other. Sackville wrote, "I made a thrust at my enemy, but was short; and on drawing back my arm

I received a great wound therein, which I interpreted as a reward for my short shooting: but in revenge I pressed it to him, though I then missed him also, and then received a wound in my right pap [nipple], which passed both through my body and almost to my back; and there we wrestled for the two greatest and dearest prizes we could ever expect trial for, honour and life."[4]

Each had hold of the other's blade with his left hand, and Sackville, who wore only an ordinary glove, had his little finger nearly cut off in the struggle. As he wrote:

> At last, breathless, yet keeping our holds, there passed on both sides propositions of quitting each other's swords. But when amity was dead, confidence could not live; and who should quit first was the question, which on neither part either would perform; and wrestling again afresh, with a kick and a wrench together, I freed my long captivated weapon; which instantly levelling at his throat, being master still of his, I demanded if he would ask his life, or yield his sword; both which, though in that imminent danger, he bravely denied to do.
>
> Myself being wounded, and feeling loss of blood, having three conduits running on me, which began to make me faint, and he courageously persisting not to accord to either of my propositions; through remembrance of his former bloody desire, and feeling of my present estate, I struck at his heart, but with his avoiding, missed my aim, yet passed through the body; and drawing out my sword, repassed it again through another place, when he cried, "Oh! I am slain!" seconding his speech with all the force he had, to cast me [off]. But he being too weak, after I had defended his assault, I easily became master of him, laying him upon his back; when being upon him, I redemanded if he would request his life; but it seemed

> he prized it not at so dear a rate, to be beholden for it, bravely replying, he scorned it; which answer of his was so noble and worthy, as I protest I could not find it in my heart to offer him any more violence, only keeping him down, until at length his surgeon afar off cried out, he would immediately die, if his wounds were not stopped: Whereupon I asked if he desired his surgeon should come, which he accepted of; and so being drawn away, I never offered to take his sword, counting it inhuman to rob a dead man; for so I held him to be.[5]

The fight over, Sackville submitted to the attentions of his own surgeon. He had lost so much blood that his vision failed him, and for some moments he assumed he had not long to live, but the "strong waters" administered by his surgeon revived him.

As Sackville rested, Bruce's surgeon suddenly snatched up his man's sword and came at him. If Sackville's surgeon hadn't quickly picked up Sackville's sword and defended him, he might have been slain where he lay. The incident shocked all present, including the mortally wounded Bruce, who chastised his man with a cry of "rascal, hold thy hand!"

Bruce died shortly thereafter. Sackville recovered from his wounds and returned to England. He was briefly out of favor at the court of James I, for whom the fashion for dueling among his friends and acquaintances had become a serious concern. The king issued a lengthy proclamation against "the bloody exercise of the duelloe," which, like most such efforts, came to nothing. Sir Francis Bacon wrote that "when [James I] came forth and saw himself princely attended with goodly noblesse and gentlemen, he entered into the thought that none of their lives were in certainty, not for twenty-four hours, from the duel; for it was but an heat or a mistaking, and then a lie, and then a challenge, and then life."[6]

NOTES

1. George L. Craik, *The Romance of the Peerage, or Curiosities of Family History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848–1850): 319–320.
2. Ibid.
3. "Needlessly," Sackville writes, because he might have refused the challenge without dishonor after Lord Bruce had suffered his blows.
4. Craik, *The Romance of the Peerage,* 324–325.
5. Ibid., 325–326.
6. Millingen, *History of Duelling*, 2:10.

4

COMTE DE BUSSY VS. DE BUSC

MARCH 1638

Born in 1618 to French nobility, Roger de Rabutin, comte de Bussy, entered the army at age 16 with the professed intention of becoming an *honnête homme* (worldly gentleman) and distinguishing himself in battle. He fought in several campaigns and, between them, in a number of duels. He left an account of a March 1638 encounter:

> Some time after I was in Paris, I went out one day to a show at the Hôtel de Bourgogne with four of my friends, when a young Gascon gentleman named Busc, whose father was captain of the Navarre Regiment, begged leave of me to ask if it was true that Damask, Count de Tianges, cousin of my father, said that he was a drunkard and his son is crazy. I answered him that I knew the Count de Tianges only slightly, and did not know if he said this. He retorted that he was my uncle [by the Brittany definition], and since he was not able to go and get satisfaction from him, he would address himself to me.

"Ah, since you would like me to reply for him," I said, "I will say that whoever said such a thing lied."

"It was my brother," he said to me, "who is a child."

"You should horsewhip him," I answered, "because he lies like a grown man."

During this exchange, we both put our hands on the grips of our swords. He had but one friend with him, while I had four, who were soon joined by an equal number, all of whom had swords in their hands and who lined up with me. I begged them to let me handle this alone, and at the same time I advanced on Busc, who retreated alongside the street so quickly that it was difficult for me to keep up with him. While this gave me a bad impression of him, still, he was very brave; it was just that the number of the friends around me cowed him, not knowing if I intended to press my advantage. After having pushed him back more than a hundred steps, I withdrew with a few insults, and I sent a captain of my regiment, named Rigny, gentleman of [the] Nivernois, to ask him his address.

He gave it to him. But the name of the street was so uncommon that my captain forgot it, so that having gone to my lodging in the Rue d'Enfer, near Chartreux, for fear that the reports of our quarrel would have obliged the French marshals to arrest me at my usual dwellings, Busc and I spent two days looking for each other without being able to get any news. At last a third party, a gentleman that I knew not at all, and whose name no longer comes to mind, sought me out to tell me that he had learned I had quarreled with Busc, and that he would find him and tell me where he was, provided that I would consent to use him [as a second], saying that, while not knowing either of us, he was inclined to serve me. I gave him a thousand thanks for this proof of friendship; I begged him to consider that I already had four of my friends with me, that if this was a battle rather than a duel I would have accepted the honor that he wanted to do me; but that I was already greatly obligated to him for what he was doing. He declared to me that he was happy with my reasons; "and since," he told me, "monsieur, I am not then to be one of yours, you will not mind that I go to offer my service to M. de Busc, and that I tell him that you are here."

I respected this gentleman's way of conducting himself; we embraced, and it was not long before I saw Busc passing by my lodging in a carriage accompanied by four men, among them my adventurer. I followed them on horseback with my friends almost to the Bourg-la-Reine, where together we chose a place for our fight. We were about to begin when suddenly we heard a cavalier calling from a distance to us, "Wait, messieurs, wait!" This was l'Aigues, who, having an interest in this quarrel, had come to serve Busc.

As Busc now found himself with one man more than I had, we all decided that I would send one of my friends back to Paris to look for someone, and meanwhile the rest of us went to a hotel in the Bourg-la-Reine for a light meal. Not knowing where he would find someone at that hour, no one being home after dinner unless they were ill, my friend went to the Pont Neuf, where after a quarter of an hour he passed a musketeer whom he did not know. He approached him and told him that I needed a friend to help me settle my quarrel, and that he looked like the sort of man who would not refuse such a job, nor a man such as me. The musketeer thanked him for the compliment, and mounted his horse behind him.

As it was already late when my friend went to Paris, they lost their way, and instead of going to the Bourg-la-Reine, they took another way, so that the rest of us, seeing that the night might pass without the return of my friend, decided to return together to the city. At this time Busc and I had the opportunity to speak together alone. He suggested that I separate from my friends and he from his, and that we meet each other alone the next day at the walls of the Louvre, because, he told me, we might not be able to finish our fight otherwise, and we would not have satisfaction if we were separated.

I agreed, and we both made our way the next day, at eight o'clock in the morning, to the front of the Louvre, on horseback, with one servant only. All was carried out as we had agreed the day before; we went to the road of Vanvre, where we took sword in hand. Because the sun was in Busc's eyes when we stood lengthwise on the road, he turned and put his back to a ditch that separated the road from the Pré-aux-Clercs, so that I was forced to put my back to an earthen embankment that bordered the road on the other side.

With the second blow that I gave him I perforated his lung; and because I had strongly advanced on him, I backed up, without thinking about the embankment behind me, so that I fell over backwards. Busc, who was seriously injured, threw himself on me; and calling upon me to beg for my life, he tried at the same time to thrust his sword into my body; but I dodged the blow, and his sword only grazed my ribs and went into the ground.

My fear that he would repeat the blow made me grab his sword by the blade; and when he pulled it up it cut my fingers and particularly my thumb, and put-

> ting it at my throat, he obliged me to give him mine. However, as we both got up he fell over sideways, spitting out a big mouthful of blood.
>
> Believing that he was dead, I took his sword and mine and I took refuge at the mansion of Condé. The Prince Henri Bourbon was not there then, but Isabelle of Montmorency, his wife, and Isabelle of Bourbon, his daughter, who since became the Duchess of Longueville, promised me their protection and made me a thousand honors and endearments.
>
> As for Busc, his servant having gone to give notice to his friends of his fate, one of them brought him to the home of Henri of Lorraine, Count d'Harcourt, who sent me a compliment and a sort of excuse that he was sheltering a man who had fought against me, and that he believed me rather generous to leave him alive. I accepted this compliment gratefully, and I returned Busc's sword while acknowledging what had happened. I have never thought about him since, for he only lived for six months after that blow.[1]

In 1641, Rabutin was confined in the Bastille for several months for neglecting his official duties in favor of a romantic tryst. In 1646 his reputation suffered further when he was charged with attempting to abduct a rich widow. In 1659 he was utterly disgraced when he was caught taking part in an orgy during Holy Week. He was forced to retire to his estates, where he wrote, among other things, *Histoire Amoureuse des Gaules*, a witty exposé of the sexual intrigues of the court ladies. That cost him another year in the Bastille as well as his officer's commission. He lived until 1693.

NOTE

1. Roger de Rabutin, *Memoires de Roger de Rabutin, Comte de Bussy* (Paris: Charpentier Libraire-Éditeur, 1857): 21–25.

5

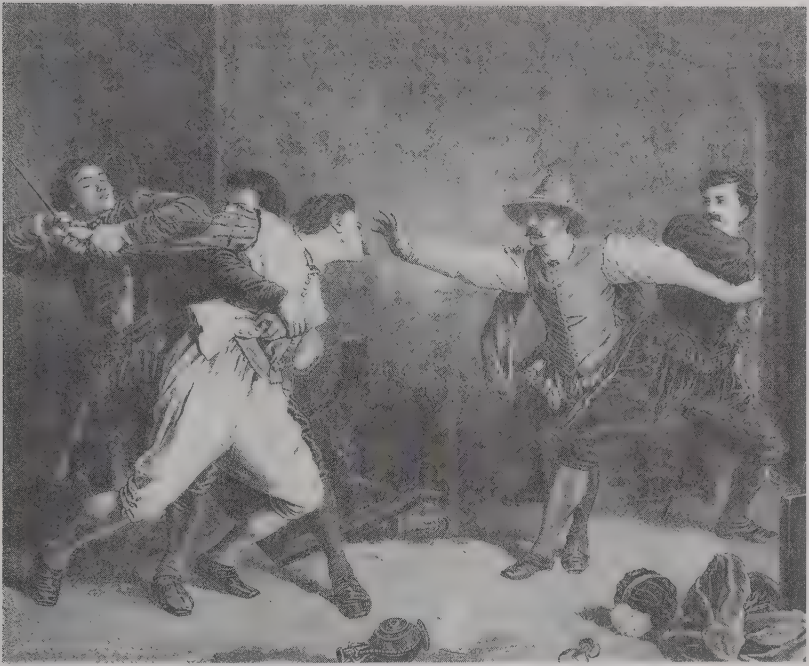
SIR JOHN RERESBY VS. MACDEMAR

JULY 12, 1662

Born in 1634, from an early age Sir John Reresby was prone to quarrels, being "too apt to take notice of any carriage or word that looked like a disrespect," and having found that "the best way to prevent [disputes] for the future is not to seem too backward in seeking reparation."

Reresby kept a diary in which he recorded details of his numerous scraps and scuffles, including a duel he fought on July 12, 1663:

> Sir Henry Bellasis[1] sent to invite me to dinner at the Bear at the bridge-foot, where one Macdemar, an Irish gentleman, was to give him a venison pasty. At dinner the latter provoked me to give him some language, which he so far resented that he demanded satisfaction, either by my denying I had meant any injury to him by the saying of the words, and asking his pardon, or by fighting with him. I denied the first, and so being challenged was obliged to fight him that afternoon in Hyde



"A Duel Interrupted" by Ernest Meissonier.

Park, which I did, an Irish gentlemen that he met by the way being his second, and Sir Henry Bellasis mine. At the first pass I hurt him slightly on the sword hand, and at the same time he closing with me, we both fell to the ground (he having hold of my sword and I of his). Sir Henry and his man were fighting at the same time close by, and Sir Henry had got the better, wounded the other in the belly, and disarmed him, and was coming in to us [to assist Reresby] as we were both risen, I having got [Macdemar's] sword out of his hand, which I took home with me, but sent it to him the next day. The second to Macdemar was in danger of death by his wound for some weeks, which made us abscond. I

> was with the Duke of Buckingham the best part of this time at Wallingford House; but at last it pleased God that the man recovered.[2]

NOTES

1. This is the same Bellasis that Reresby's fellow diarist Samuel Pepys mentions as the victim of a duel in his entries for July 30 and August 8, 1667.
2. Sir John Reresby, *The Memoirs of Sir John Reresby*, James J. Cartwright, ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875): 58.

6

DUKE OF HAMILTON VS. LORD MOHUN

NOVEMBER 15, 1712

In the autumn of 1712, a duel of unparalleled savagery ended the lives of the Duke of Hamilton and Lord Mohun, two of Britain's most colorful peers.

James, the fourth Duke of Hamilton, was born on April 11, 1658. His star rose and fell at court with the upheavals in the monarchy: in 1687 James II made him the first knight of the Order of the Thistle, but in 1689, after William and Mary took the throne, the duke was confined for two years in the Tower of London. In 1712, under the patronage of Queen Anne, his fortunes took a dramatic upturn. She not only appointed him ambassador extraordinaire to France, but awarded him England's highest honor, the Order of the Garter, while allowing him to retain his place in the Order of the Thistle, an unprecedented privilege. The Duke of Hamilton is not known to have fought any duels before his meeting with Lord Mohun, though he had used his sword to fend off four or five swordsmen who attacked him in his sedan chair late one night in February 1689, in an assassination attempt.

Charles, the fourth Baron Mohun, was born 19 years later than Hamilton to the day. Even as he was brought into the world, his father lay on his deathbed from an abdominal wound suffered in a sword duel five months earlier. Charles Mohun fought his first duel before he turned 16, with Lord Kennedy, and both were slightly wounded. A few months later he was involved in a far more serious affray. His closest friend, Capt. Richard Hill, had been stalking one of London's most popular actresses, Mrs. Anne Bracegirdle, and on the night of December 9, 1692, Mohun helped him try to abduct her. Plans went awry, and Hill ended up thrusting his sword through the chest of William Mountford, Bracegirdle's husband. Mohun's trial for complicity in the murder was one of the most lurid ever held in the House of Lords. He was acquitted, but he did not seem chastened with his brush with the law: he pulled his sword on a coachman during a dispute in 1694, beat a journalist in 1695, and fought two duels in 1697, in the second of which he mortally wounded his opponent. He received a pardon from William III, who valued him as a reliable Whig supporter. Mohun was tried by his peers the following year for his involvement in the murder of Capt. Richard Coote. He was again acquitted, though the presiding judge warned him that his calamitous life could not continue as it had. Perhaps Mohun took his words to heart; it would be 14 years before he committed another homicide.

Both Hamilton and Mohun had a claim, through marriage, to the rich estate of the Earl of Macclesfield, which pitted them against each other in a long, bitter legal battle.

In a court hearing on November 13, 1712, Hamilton was overheard saying of one of Mohun's key witnesses that his testimony "had neither truth nor justice in it," to which Mohun retorted, "He has as much truth as his Grace." Afterward Mohun got together with a friend and political ally, Gen. George Maccartney, to vent his anger and frustration.

Maccartney, like Mohun, had a murky past. Born in 1660, he had risen to the rank of brigadier general in the Scots Foot

Guards, but he tarnished his reputation by squandering his wife's fortune and running his regiment into debt. In 1709, he was tried for raping and beating his landlady and got off with a fine and damages. The landlady appealed to the queen, who dismissed Maccartney from his command. It is believed that he subsisted on handouts from Mohun for the following two years.[1]

As they sat over drinks Mohun complained, "His Grace has, before a Master in Chancery, treated my witnesses so very ill, that I cannot help thinking it as meant to [insult] myself." Mohun was counting on the inheritance to rescue him financially, and he feared that Hamilton's newfound favor at court would tip justice in his favor.

The following day there commenced a series of meetings among Mohun, Maccartney, and Hamilton, which culminated in arrangements for a duel.

On the morning of Saturday, November 15, Mohun and Maccartney set out before dawn for the Ring in Hyde Park.

Hamilton got started a short time later, accompanied by his kinsman, Col. John Hamilton (henceforth simply referred to as "the colonel" for clarity), whom he had enlisted as his second. The colonel had a long-standing grudge against Maccartney, rooted not only in their political differences, but in the fact that Maccartney had been promoted over him in the army.

Shortly after Hamilton and the colonel set out, the latter realized he had forgotten his sword. Hamilton stopped the coach and sent his footman home to fetch one. The footman returned with the first weapon he had come across—a mourning sword. Though a perfectly serviceable weapon, it was intended as part of a gentleman's mourning attire, having a blackened blade and hilt. Its choice was subsequently pointed to as a fatal omen.

When the parties met near the Ring at about 7:30 A.M., Hamilton asked, "My lord, have I come [in] time enough?"

To which Maccartney answered, "Time enough."

In an apparent aspersion on his performance as a second, Hamilton said to Maccartney, “Let the event of this be what it will, you are the occasion of it.”

Maccartney retorted, “I had a commission for it.”

Suggesting that the colonel and Maccartney refrain from engaging, Mohun said, “My lord duke, these two gentlemen shall have nothing to do.”

Maccartney, in no mood for restraint, said, “We will take our shares.”

Gesturing toward the colonel, Hamilton said, “Here’s my friend, he will take his share in my dance.”

At that, the men threw off their cloaks and drew their swords.

Maccartney gave his version of what happened next:

> Immediately both Lords drew, and I can give little Account of their Action, being at the same Instant engaged with Colonel Hamilton, with whom after some Parrying I closed in, and getting his Sword from him with my Left Hand, he caught hold of mine with his Right Hand, just below the Hilt. “Sir,” said I, “struggle not, for I have your Sword”: “Sir,” said he, “I have a Grip of yours”; “Quit it then,” said I, “and don’t force me to run you in the Back, but let’s haste to save them.”
>
> I saw the Lords then struggle and fall together, their Ground being much changed in the Action; for at the beginning my Lord Mohun was on my Left Hand, and they now fell, almost behind Colonel Hamilton.[2]

Almost from the moment the men started fighting, several witnesses rushed forward from about 100 yards away to stop them. These men, who later provided important testimony, were John Reynolds, keeper of a nearby inn; John Pennington, the hackney coachman who had brought Mohun and Maccartney to the park; William Norris, a groom who was walking some horses; and John Nicholson, a groundskeeper.

Maccartney's account continues:

> While I was yet uttering the Words I mentioned last, to Colonel Hamilton, the Keepers came up and found us two in this posture, standing upon our Legs close struggling, his Sword in my Left Hand free over his Right Shoulder, and my Sword in my Right Hand, he pulling at the Blade with both his.
>
> One of these Keepers took our two Swords; and I think another ran at the same Instant to the Lords, crying out, "What a deal of Mischief is done here! Would to God we had come sooner; you Gentlemen are such strange Creatures!"[3]

Reynolds and Nicholson attempted to bend or break the blades but were able to bend only Maccartney's.

Not surprisingly, the colonel had a different version of his fight with Maccartney. As reported by his supporters:

> *Mackartney* [*sic*] made a full Pass at *Hamilton*, which he parrying down with great force, wounded himself in his Instep; however, he took that Opportunity to close with and disarm *Mackartney*, and said, "[Y]our Life is in my Power." After which, he turned his Head, and seeing my Lord *Mohun* fall, and the Duke upon him, [the colonel] ran to the Duke's assistance, and that he might with the more ease help him, he flung down both the Swords.[4]

Maccartney's account goes on:

> As we stept to the Lords, as I think not above four Yards from us, Lord *Mohun* was not altogether on his Back, but in a manner between lying and sitting, bending forwards to Duke Hamilton, of whose Sword he had a hold with his Left Hand. Duke *Hamilton* was on his Knees, leaning to his Left, almost across Lord *Mohun*, and holding Lord *Mohun*'s Sword also fast with his Left Hand, both striving, but neither able to disengage himself from t'other.[5]

Mohun said he was wounded, but would deliver his sword if the Duke would deliver his.

Hamilton was not so forthcoming; Reynolds had to wrest it from his grip, bending it in the process. He took the four weapons some distance away.

"By God, my Lord Duke's killed!" cried the colonel.

"By God, my Lord Mohun's killed!" exclaimed Maccartney.

"We've made a fine morning's work on it," observed the colonel.

Maccartney grasped John Nicholson earnestly by the hand and, anticipating the inquest, said, "Honest friend, bear witness that we endeavoured to part them, and pray remember that I in the grey cloaths and the silver lac'd hat, tell you so."

Hamilton was assisted from the field by the colonel and Reynolds. After staggering about 30 yards, he was overcome by weakness, sat down against a tree, and called for a coach. He was probably dead by the time he was put in it.

Meanwhile, Nicholson tried to help Maccartney lift Mohun, but he was too heavy.

"I believe he's dead," said Nicholson.

"God forbid!" responded Maccartney, "Perhaps his bleeding inwardly may make him sick, turn him on his side that his wound may bleed outwards."

With the help of the footman, Mohun was put into the same hackney coach in which he had arrived and taken home. It was later said that his wife was most upset that his bloody body had been laid on a bed covered with a magnificent counterpane, ruining the embroidered fabric.

The coroner's report for Hamilton reads:

> Monsieur *Boussier*, who opened the Duke's Body, in the presence of Dr. *Shadwell*, declared, that upon Examination he found the following Wounds:
>
> 1. One in the Right Arm, in the Joint of the Elbow, cutting the chief artery asunder; about an Inch deep, by which the Duke lost so much Blood, that he judges it to be the *Occasion of the Duke's dying so soon.*
> 2. A wound upon the Breast in the Left Side, between the second and third of the upper Ribs, about an Inch broad, penetrating downwards thro' the nervous Center of the Diaphragm or Midriff, and thro' the Omentum or Caul of the Abdomen, which Wound would, in all likelihood, have proved mortal, though *not immediately*.
> 3. A large Wound in the outside of the Right Leg, about Seven Inches long, piercing through the *Tarsus* or Joint of the Foot, which Wound would have been very dangerous.
> 4. An inconsiderable Wound in the Left Foot.[6]

The coroner's report for Mohun reads:

> Mr. *La Fage*, an eminent surgeon . . . examin'd the Wounds, and [found the following]:
>
> 1. There was one on the Right Side, near the short Ribs, penetrating into the Abdomen, and piercing into the

> Epiploon, the Gut Ileon, the Mesentery in Two Places, close to the said Gut, and going out by the Ileon-Bone, on the Left Side; which Wound would undoubtedly have proved mortal, tho' not immediately.
>
> 2. Another Wound on the Left Side, about six Inches distant from the other backwards; and about three Inches long, but not penetrating.
>
> 3. A third Wound on the superior and interior Part of the left Thigh, about an Inch broad and two Inches deep.
>
> 4. A large Wound in the Inguen or Groin, on the Left Side, four Inches broad, going down through the great Vessels of the Thigh, and coming out under the Buttock, which was the cause of his Lordship's immediate Death: [*Footnote in original*: The Surgeon put his Hands into the opposite Sides of the Wound, and his Hands met.]
>
> His Lordship had also two or three of his Fingers of his Left Hand cut.[7]

A pamphlet published shortly after the duel characterized it this way:

> That they fought with all the fury and violence peculiar to the known Courage of them both, that every Witness allows, and the Wounds they receiv'd on both sides seem to tell us plainly, they fought like two wild Beasts more than Men; or like two Men that saw they were to Die, and resolv'd to carry their enemy along with them. If we will consult the Manner of their Fighting, it is not likely that they Fenc'd or Parry'd at all, that they us'd any Art; but without Guard or Regard, desperately exposed their Bodies, and received Wounds on both sides at every Thrust, having each of them four Wounds, and each of them two which were Mortal and impossible to be cured.[8]

From the testimony of the witnesses and the position of the wounds, the fight was reconstructed as follows: Hamilton rushed upon Mohun, slashing at him and cutting him on the left side and then thrusting him through the right side and out the back, a mortal wound. Mohun lashed back, slashing Hamilton on the right calf, inflicting a wound about eight inches long and four inches wide. Mohun made another thrust through the inside of Hamilton's right elbow, severing a small tendon and the brachial artery, which caused the massive blood loss responsible for his death. While Mohun was being driven back he shortened his sword[9] and stabbed downward, plunging it eight inches into Hamilton's breast. Hamilton kept pressing forward, though, causing Mohun to stumble backwards into a small ditch. As he fell, Hamilton thrust into his groin, the point extending out the left buttock and cutting the femoral artery, a mortal wound. Mohun grabbed the blade with his left hand, nearly losing three fingers while trying to hold it back.

Once Mohun had been taken from the field Maccartney saw to his own escape, hiding at the home of the Duke of Richmond for a day and then making his way to the Spanish Netherlands.

The colonel also left the ground, but he turned himself in a few days later and appeared at the judicial inquisition on November 17. Here he made an incendiary accusation that colored all future understanding of the duel: that the downward thrust through Hamilton's breast had been inflicted not by Mohun but by Maccartney, treacherously. As it was reported,

> As he was raising my Lord Duke up, he says, That he saw *Maccartney* make a push at his Grace; that he immediately open'd the duke's Breast, but seeing no Blood, did not at first discover the Wound; and he took up his Sword, expecting *Mackartney* wou'd attack him again; but he walk'd off. But that soon after, opening his Grace's Breast a second time, they

> discovered the Wound *Mackartney* had given him in the Left Side.[10]

This accusation was picked up by Tory pamphleteers, who painted the duel as a Whig assassination plot.

The question of whether or not Mohun could have delivered the downward thrust was the subject of popular debate, and one tendentious Tory pamphlet, *A True and Impartial Account of the Murder of His Grace the Duke of Hamilton and Brandon by Mackartney*, argued that Maccartney must have dealt the blow because it was impossible that Mohun could have struck the right-handed Hamilton on the left and that Maccartney's sword was bloody for 12 inches of its length, while the wound he had inflicted on the colonel's foot was only two inches deep. (Reynolds had preserved the swords, with their telltale bloodstains, until the inquest.)

These charges were refuted in a book by John Le Neve:

> As to the Wound in the Duke's Breast, my Lord *Mohun* and *Mackartney*'s Friends said, it was no difficult thing to account for my Lord *Mohun*'s giving it him; If we did but consider, that the Duke was Ambidexter, and used his Sword with equal Ease and Dexterity with both Hands; so that having received the Wound in his Right Arm, 'tis probable he shifted his Sword to his Left, and push'd at the Lord *Mohun*'s Left Groin, where he gave his Lordship the mortal Wound, and stooping open'd and presented his Left Breast to his Adversary: This is the more probable, because the duke was found with his Sword in his Left Hand, nor is it possible otherwise to account for the Lord *Mohun*'s mortal Wound. To this they further added, that Mr. Buissiere being ask'd at Colonel *Hamilton*'s Tryal, *If the Wound in the Duke's Right Arm, which was the cause of his sudden*

> *Death, would hinder the holding his Sword in his Right Hand*? He answer'd that, he might use that arm for a while, it being the small and not the main Tendon that was cut: But 'tis certain likewise, that *Buissiere* said he was of Opinion, that after he received that Wound he made use of his Left Hand, and push'd at my Lord *Mohun*; and the better to explain how the Duke could receive the Wound in his Left Pap from my Lord *Mohun*; Mr. *Buissiere* put himself in the Posture he supposed the Duke to have been in, to the great Satisfaction of the Court and the Spectators.[11]

A Strict Enquiry into the Circumstance of a Late Duel also points out that there was so much blood on the scene that it was useless to draw inferences from the amount of blood on Maccartney's blade, which might have gotten on it when it was being pushed against the ground to bend it. If the accusation were true, it would raise several obvious questions: why did Hamilton not mention the outrage in his last few minutes of consciousness? Why did the colonel not react immediately, but rather allow Maccartney to leave the scene unhindered and only level his accusation several days afterward? Why did all four of the witnesses swear they did not see Maccartney do what the colonel testified?

Col. John Hamilton was tried for murder on December 12, 1712, and found not guilty, but guilty of manslaughter as an accessory to the duel. He pleaded "benefit of clergy," was branded with a cold iron and released.[12]

In 1714, with Queen Anne dead and George I on the throne, General Maccartney decided to return to England and stand trial for murder. The colonel hedged on his former testimony, and with the sworn witnesses supporting Maccartney's version, the latter was acquitted but, like Hamilton, convicted of manslaughter and branded with a cold iron. He was restored to his military posts and soon became a royal favorite and was eventually promoted to commander of the royal forces in Ireland. He continued his thieving ways, looting his commands, charging exorbitant fees for commissions, and misappropriating funds until his death in 1760.

It was not until 1745 that the dispute over the Macclesfield estate was at last resolved, in favor of the Mohun family.

NOTES

1. Robert S. Forsythe, *A Noble Rake, The Life of Charles, Fourth Lord Mohun* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928): 257–265.
2. George Maccartney, *A Letter from Mr. Maccartney to His Friend in London* (London: A. Baldwin, 1713): 16.
3. Ibid., 17.
4. *A True and Impartial Account of the Murder of His Grace the Duke of Hamilton and Brandon by Mackartney*, 7.
5. Maccartney, *Letter*, 17.
6. John Le Neve, *The Lives and Characters of the Most Illustrious Persons, British and Foreign, Who Died in the Year 1712: viz, the Duke of Hamilton, the Duke of Leeds . . .* (London: S. Holt, 1714): 400.
7. Ibid., 409.
8. *A Strict Enquiry into the Circumstances of a Late Duel, with Some Account of the Persons Concern'd on Both Sides* (London: J. Baker, 1712): 19–20.
9. Shortening the sword was a common close-in technique. The blade is grasped at its halfway point with the left hand, and the weapon is wielded like a rifle with fixed bayonet.
10. *A True and Impartial Account*, 7.
11. Le Neve, *The Lives and Characters*, 401.
12. Benefit of clergy was a privilege of the medieval clergy similar to diplomatic immunity, later extended to anyone who could read and, after 1706, to the general public. It amounted to a one-time amnesty for certain crimes, including manslaughter, and required only that the perpetrator be branded on the thumb. It became customary to perform the branding in a strictly symbolic fashion, with a cold iron.

7

DUEL WITH A DANCING MASTER

EARLY 18TH CENTURY

In his memoir published in 1760, Irish poet John Carteret Pilkington describes his eccentric granduncle, Dr. George Vanlewen of Cork, as "one of the best natured gentlemen existing; but his peculiar oddity makes strangers frequently mistake him for morose and ill-natured, which indeed, as much as his good nature will permit him, he endeavours to affect."

Vanlewen had gone to the home of a local gentleman to assist his wife, who was in labor, and when he arrived encountered "a very spruce dancing master, and excellent swordsman," who was visiting.[1]

> The doctor, who is homely in his person and plain in his apparel, when he entered a room where the gentleman of the house and this person were, cry'd, "Zounds, Sir, what d'ye want with these butterflies about you at such a time as this? Turn him out of doors."
>
> The dancing-master, just arrived from Paris, imagined this rencounter a little *malapropos*; and he

neither knowing my uncle, nor the occasion of his coming, told the gentleman of the house he understood no such treatment, and would demand satisfaction from that sorry fellow, whoever he was.

My uncle, who had but passed into another room, overheard him; and came out with a very serene countenance, to acquaint him that if he would wait but fifteen minutes, he would make any concession so great a personage thought proper to require; returning immediately into the room, he dispatched his business in half the time, and after having brought the lady a son, came to fulfill his engagement.

The whole thing was so sudden and whimsical that the gentleman of the house had not presence of mind to interpose his good offices; or, perhaps, the situation his wife was in might have engrossed all his attention: However it was, the disputants went out together.

The dancing master told my uncle he desired to meet him on the Mall the next morning at five o'clock;—"No, no," says the Doctor, "I shan't then be out of Bed, but if you please, I'll wait on you now."

The antagonist finding him true blood, offered many reasons for postponing the combat, particularly his being obliged to teach some ladies to dance.

"By G-d," says the Doctor, "I'll teach you to dance, and sing too, before we part, as sorry a fellow as I appear." Upon this he drew his sword, and desired his enemy to do the same; the second pass he wounded the dancing-master in the sword arm, which possibly saved his guts; he dropped his weapon and asked for mercy, which the Doctor generously shewed him; and drawing his sword very carefully from the wound, he immediately pulled out a case of surgical instruments, dressed his arm, and sent him

> home in a chair, recommending it strenuously to him not to be so hasty in his conclusions for the future.
>
> After these proofs of his skill in surgery and the sword, he paid a visit to the lying-in lady, and found her as well as he could wish; "But pray, Doctor," said the gentleman of the house, "why did you leave us so abruptly?"
>
> "Only to skewer a woodcock," replied the Doctor, very gravely, which was all the information could be obtained from him; it excited the gentleman's curiosity to send to the dancing master's lodgings, where he was found very ill in bed; the doctor, however, carefully attended to him, supplied him with all the necessaries, and was so firm a friend to him from that time, that his recommendations were the means of making the dancing master's fortune.[2]

Pilkington offers this moral: "Never affront a man who is in every way your superior, because his inclination does not lead him to be such a jack-daw [ostentatious dresser] as yourself."

NOTES

1. In the 18th century, it was not uncommon for a fencing master to also offer lessons in dancing or riding. All were part of a gentleman's education and were rooted in similar physical skills.
2. John Carteret Pilkington, *The Real Story of John Carteret Pilkington* (London: 1760): 12–14.

8

LORD BYRON VS. VISCOUNT CHAWORTH

JANUARY 26, 1765

The poet Lord Byron was famously described as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know." In none of those regards, however, could he compete with his great uncle, the fifth Lord Byron. Known as the Wicked Lord, he was a roué who was rumored to hold frequent orgies at his estate and a reckless spendthrift who ran his patrimony into ruin, covering his debts by selling the ancient oaks on his property for timber. He once attempted to abduct an actress and is accused of having shot a coachman dead over a trifle. Most of all, though, he is remembered for killing his neighbor and kinsman, William Viscount Chaworth, in a controversial duel.

Both men belonged to a group of wealthy landowners, the Nottinghamshire Club, which met regularly to dine at the Star and Garter tavern in London's Pall Mall. On the night of January 26, 1765, after a few hours of food and drink, Chaworth and Byron began arguing about the best way to preserve game on an estate. Chaworth insisted on careful regulation, while Byron declared that the way to have the most game was to take no care of it at all. The debate became acrimonious, Chaworth insisting that he and another guest, Sir Charles Sedley, had more game on five acres than Byron had on all his manors. Lord Byron bet a hundred guineas that Chaworth was wrong. Chaworth called for pens, ink, and paper to put the wager in writing, but the matter was soon dropped. However, Byron was undoubtedly irritated that Chaworth had wanted to record the bet, which was not customary between gentlemen. Chaworth went on to say that "were it not for Sir Charles Sedley's care and his own, Lord Byron would not have a hare on his estate." Byron asked what Sir Charles Sedley's manors were, and Chaworth answered, "Nuttal and Bulwell."

"Nuttal, yes, but Bulwell no," said Lord Byron. "That is my own."

To this, Chaworth heatedly replied, "If you want information with respect to Sir Charles Sedley's manors, he lives at Mr. Cooper's, in Dean Street, and I doubt not will be ready to give you satisfaction; and as to myself, your lordship knows where to find me in Berkeley Row."

This was rather a strong statement, especially the use of the term *satisfaction*. The party quieted, but conversation soon resumed.

When the gathering broke up, Chaworth left the dining room and met Byron on the stairs. Chaworth asked, in a manner Byron felt did not signify civility or respect, "Has your lordship any commands for me?"

Byron responded, "I should be glad of an opportunity of speaking a few words to you."

The two went to the first landing and had a waiter show them to an empty room. After placing a candle on a table inside, the waiter withdrew. The room was dim, the only illumination coming from the candle and some embers glowing in the fireplace.

Byron asked Chaworth if he should seek recourse on the matter of the game from Sir Charles Sedley or from him. Chaworth replied, "To me, my lord, and if you have anything to say, we had better shut the door."

While Chaworth was bolting the door, Byron called out, "Draw!"

Chaworth later said that as he turned he saw that Byron's sword was half drawn. "Knowing his man," as he put it, he quickly drew his own and made the first pass. Chaworth thought he had thrust Byron through the body, but in fact his sword had merely gone through Byron's waistcoat without inflicting a wound. Wishing to disarm him, Chaworth closed in, whereupon Byron shortened his sword, or his arm,[1] and stabbed him through the left side. Chaworth felt the sword enter his body and go deep through his back, but he struggled and, being the stronger man, managed to disarm Byron.

"I am afraid I have killed your Lordship," said Chaworth, and Byron answered that he thought he had done the same to him, adding, "You may thank yourself for what happened, as you were the aggressor. I suppose you took me for a coward, but I hope now you will allow that I have behaved with as much courage as any man in the kingdom."

One of the men pulled the bell to summon the waiter. After surveying the tableau, the waiter called the tavern keeper, who sent for medical help.

When the surgeon came he found Chaworth sitting by the fire with the lower part of his waistcoat open, his shirt all covered with blood and his hand on the wound. Byron's sword had entered about an inch to the left of his navel and exited about five or six inches higher on the left side of his back. It had cut a hole a half-inch wide through the stomach, small intestines, and lower diaphragm. Chaworth asked the surgeon if the wound was mortal and, told that it was, asked that his uncle, Mr. William Levinz, be sent for to settle his affairs. Chaworth then declared that, despite his pain and distress, he would rather be in his present situation than live under the misfortune of having killed another person.

On the arrival of Mr. Levinz and his attorney, Chaworth dictated his will as well as a letter to his mother, in which he regretted his "unfortunate accident." All the while he lamented his folly at fighting in the dark because by doing so he had given up the advantage of his superior swordsmanship. He said he died as a man of honor, but that Byron had done himself no good by it.

Lord Byron was charged with murder, and his trial in the House of Lords was one of the most celebrated cases of its day. He assumed a humble and contrite manner, throwing himself on the mercy of the court.

His account of the events leading up to the duel was consistent with Chaworth's, but his version of the fight itself differed somewhat. Byron said that, upon entering the room,

> I went round on the further side of the table towards the most open part of the room, which . . . is about sixteen feet square, and the furniture did not leave a vacant space of more than twelve feet in length, and as I believe, five feet in breadth, where it was my unhappy lot to be obliged to engage.
>
> Mr. Chaworth was now turned round from bolting the door, and as I could not any longer continue in doubt of his intention, it was impossible for me in such a situation to avoid putting my hand to my sword, and I believe I might at the same time bid him draw, or use some other words of the like import. . . . Mr. Chaworth immediately drew his sword and made a thrust at me, which I parried; he made a second, which also missed of its effect: and then finding myself with my back against the table, with great disadvantage of the light, I endeavoured to shift a little more to the right hand, which unavoidably brought us nearer to each other and gave me an opportunity to perceive that the deceased gentleman was making a third pass at me. We both thrust at the same time, when I found Mr. Chaworth's sword against my ribs,

> having cut my waistcoat and shirt for upwards of eight inches; and I suppose it was then, that he received the unlucky wound, which I shall ever reflect upon with the utmost regret.[2]

Byron was found guilty of manslaughter, pleaded his clergy, and was released upon paying court fees.

Fought without seconds and in the dark, the Byron-Chaworth affair could not properly be termed a duel. It was, rather, one of the last fatal rencontres with the sword in England, at a time when the wearing of side arms was passing out of fashion.

This Lord Byron died at 77 in 1798, leaving George Byron, the poet, his heir. Of his granduncle, the latter wrote, "So far from feeling any remorse for having killed Mr. Chaworth, who was a 'Spadassin' [an accomplished assassin], and celebrated for his quarrelsome disposition, he always kept the sword which he used on that occasion in his bedchamber, and it still was there when he died."[3]

NOTES

1. Shortening the arm refers to drawing the sword hand back in order to bring the point into play at close range.
2. George Henry Borrow, *Celebrated Trials and Remarkable Cases of Criminal Jurisprudence from the Earliest Records to the Year 1825* (London: Knight & Lacey, 1825): 155–156.
3. J. Bernard Burke, Esq., *Anecdotes of the Aristocracy* (London: Henry Colburn, 1849), 1:40.

9

RICHARD SHERIDAN VS. CAPT. THOMAS MATHEWS

MAY 4, 1772, AND JULY 1, 1772

In 1775, with the triumph of his comedy *The Rivals*, 24-year-old Richard Brinsley Sheridan was the toast of the London theatrical scene. He followed up with *The Duenna* (1776), *The School for Scandal* (1777), and *The Critic* (1779). In 1780, taking an interest in politics, he ran for Parliament and was elected as a Whig, and held his seat for 32 years. Before he could begin this impressive string of accomplishments, though, he first had to survive two desperate duels.

Richard Sheridan was born in Dublin in 1751, the third son of Thomas Sheridan, a successful actor and theater manager. In 1770 the Sheridans moved to Bath, England, where the father occasionally employed Thomas Linley, a musician.

Linley had a daughter, Eliza, in whom he invested much of his hope for his family's future. Blessed with an extraordinary singing voice, Eliza was performing professionally by age 12 and by 15 was the featured singer at numerous Bath concerts. She was intelligent and high-spirited, a striking beauty who seemed to captivate every man who met her. Thomas Sheridan did not wish his sons to become too involved with the Linleys, whom he considered beneath them. In this he had an ally in Thomas Linley, who hoped Eliza would find a more advantageous match than with one of the Sheridan boys.

Eliza had a particularly unwelcome admirer in Capt. Thomas Mathews, a gentleman with estates in Ireland and Wales. Though he was married, Mathews became obsessed with Eliza and threatened to ruin her name if she didn't yield to his advances. Eliza's solution was to flee to France and enter a convent. Richard, three years her senior, agreed to accompany her as a protector, though his motives were mixed, since by this time he too had fallen in love with her. On March 18, 1772, he borrowed money and took her to Lille. In the course of their travels he confessed his feelings, and the two were secretly married.

Three weeks later, Mathews inserted a message into the *Bath Chronicle* describing the couple's flight as a scandal and accusing Sheridan of slandering him, concluding with, "I can no longer think he deserves the treatment of a gentleman, and therefore shall trouble myself no further about him than, in this public method, to post him as a L--- and a treacherous S--------." (The libelous words *liar* and *scoundrel* were indicated only by their initials.)

When Sheridan got wind of Mathews' article, the couple immediately returned to London, where Mathews was then residing. Sheridan vowed he would not sleep until he had settled with him, and after placing Eliza in the care of her father, he set off to find his adversary, carrying in his pockets a brace of pistols. He arrived at Mathews' lodging at 12:30 A.M. and began banging on the door. Mathews initially would not let him in but finally did so after Sheridan continued to pound and shout for another hour and a half.

Realizing that Sheridan had not seen the article in the *Chronicle* but had merely heard reports of it, Mathews took a conciliatory approach, claiming that it had been exaggerated terribly. Sheridan left, placated, but soon he learned that Mathews had lied to him and sent his brother Charles to demand an apology from Mathews. When Mathews refused, Charles delivered a challenge. The duel was scheduled for 6 P.M. on May 4 at the Ring in Hyde Park. Entitled to the choice of weapons, Mathews chose swords. Mathews had studied fencing in France and was considered an expert. Sheridan, who had taken lessons from renowned fencing master Angelo, was confident he could handle himself. He also brought his pistols in case they might be required.

Sheridan was already at the park with his second, Simon Ewart, and his surgeon when Mathews arrived accompanied by his second, his uncle Captain Knight. The men walked to the Ring, where Mathews complained that the ground was uneven. They moved a short distance away, but Mathews claimed to see a watchman nearby. At another spot Mathews again objected to the presence of a bystander. Complaining of Mathews's lack of determination, Sheridan approached the bystander and politely asked him to leave, which he did. However, Sheridan returned to find that Mathews' party had withdrawn to the entrance of the park. After some discussion, they went to the Castle Tavern on Henrietta Street, where they hired an upstairs room in which to fight.

In a letter written to Knight two months after the engagement, Sheridan recapped what followed:

> Mr. Ewart took lights up in his hand, and almost immediately on our entering the room we engaged. I struck Mr. Mathews' point so much out of line[1] that I stepped up and caught hold of his wrist, or the hilt of his sword, while the point of mine was at his breast. You ran in and caught hold of my arm, exclaiming, "*Don't kill him!*" I struggled to disengage my arm, and said his sword was in my power. Mr. Mathews called out twice or thrice: "*I beg my life.*" We were parted. You immediately said: "*There, he has begged his life, and*

now there is an end of it"; and on M. Ewart's saying that when his sword was in my power, as I attempted no more, you should not have interfered, you replied that you "*were wrong*," but that you had "*done it hastily and to prevent mischief*"—or words to that effect. Mr. Mathews then hinted that I was rather *obliged to your interposition* for the advantage: you declared that before you did so both the swords were in Mr. Sheridan's power. Mr. Mathews still seemed resolved to give it another turn, and observed that *he had never quitted his sword*. Provoked at this, I then swore (with too much heat, perhaps) that he should either give up his sword and I would break it, or go to his guard again. He refused—but on my persisting either gave it into my hand, or flung it on the table or the ground (which, I will not absolutely affirm). I broke it and flung the hilt to the other end of the room. He exclaimed at this. I took a mourning sword from Mr. Ewart, and, presenting him with mine, gave my honour that what had passed should never be mentioned by me, and he might now right himself again. He replied that he "would never draw a sword against the man who had given him his life;" but on his still exclaiming against the indignity of breaking his sword (which he brought upon himself), Mr. Ewart offered him the pistols, and some altercation passed between them. Mr. Mathews said that he could never show his face if it were known that his sword was broke—that such a thing had never been done—that it cancelled all obligations, &c, &c. You seemed to think it was wrong, and we both proposed that if he never misrepresented the affair it should not be mentioned by us. This was settled. I then asked Mr. Mathews, whether (as he had expressed himself sensible of and shocked at the injustice and indignity he

> had done me by his advertisement) it did not occur to him that he owed me another satisfaction [a clear public apology]; and that as it was now in his power to do it without discredit, I supposed he would not hesitate. This he absolutely refused, unless conditionally; I insisted on it, and said I would not leave the room till it was settled. After much altercation, and with much ill grace, he gave the apology which afterwards appeared.[2]

Sheridan dictated the apology, which Mathews signed. Published in the *Bath Chronicle* on May 7, it read: "Being convinced that the expressions I made use of to Mr. Sheridan's disadvantage were the effects of passion and misrepresentation, I retract what I have said to his disadvantage and particularly beg his pardon for my advertisement in the *Bath Chronicle*."

Sheridan's victory was celebrated throughout Bath. His father, who was initially mortified by the publicity surrounding the duel, was soon expressing pride at his son's dash. Nevertheless, he was still unalterably opposed to Richard's relationship with Eliza, as was Eliza's father—neither of them knew of their marriage. This opposition, of course, only fanned the flames of love, as did the dramatic and romantic duel. While Thomas Sheridan was away for a lengthy stay in London with Charles, Richard and Eliza carried on their relationship with love letters and secret meetings.

Mathews retired to his estate in Wales, where, rankling under accusations of cowardice, he claimed that he had offered his apology only as "a point of generosity," rather than upon demand. He denied having begged for his life and accused Sheridan of breaking his sword without warning as it lay on the table.

Because Mathews had gone public with his version of events, Sheridan felt free to present his own, portraying Mathews as a man who had not only been humiliated, but had lied about it. In response, Mathews wrote up an account of the duel casting himself in a more favorable light and had his friend William Barnett deliver it to Sheridan with a demand that he sign it. Sheridan refused. Barnett promptly delivered a challenge. Though fearful of his father's wrath, Sheridan accepted, choosing swords as the weapon.

As his second Sheridan selected a Captain Paumier. A young man with no experience in matters of this sort, Paumier was to prove unequal to the task.

Before this encounter, Sheridan seems to have given more thought to the possibility that he might not survive it than he had on the previous occasion. He wrote letters to his father and sisters, and in a note to a friend had this to say about Eliza: "I wish dying could assure me of the power to come from Heaven to her with that happiness which I fear she will never know here." As he dressed for the duel, he hung a miniature of her on a fine chain around his neck.

The parties met at the White Hart Inn in Bath. Both men spent the evening drinking and were heavily intoxicated when they set out to fight at 3 A.M. on July 1, 1772. They drove four miles in separate coaches to Kingsdown Common. It was sloping ground, not particularly suited for swordplay.

Barnett provided the following account of the duel:

> On quitting our chaises at the top of Kingsdown, I entered into a conversation with Captain Paumier, relative to some preliminaries I thought ought to be settled in an affair which was likely to end very seriously—particularly the method of using their pistols, which Mr. Mathews had repeatedly signified his desire to use prior to swords, from a conviction that Mr. Sheridan would run in on him, and an ungentlemanly scuffle probably be the consequence. This, however, was refused by Mr. Sheridan, declaring he had no pistols: Captain Paumier replied he had a brace (which I know were loaded).

By my advice, Mr. Mathews's were not loaded, as I imagined it was always customary to load on the field, which I mentioned to Captain Paumier at the White-Hart, before we went out, and desired he would draw his pistols.[3] He replied, as they were already loaded, and they going on a public road at this time of the morning, he might as well let them remain so, till we got to the place appointed, when he would on his honour draw them, which I am convinced he would have done had there been time; but Mr. Sheridan immediately drew his sword, and, in a vaunting manner, desired Mr. Mathews to draw (their ground was very uneven, and near the post-chaises).

Mr. Mathews drew; Mr. Sheridan advanced on him at first; Mr. Mathews in turn advanced fast on Mr. Sheridan; upon which he retreated, till he very suddenly ran in upon Mr. Mathews, laying himself exceedingly open and endeavouring to get hold of Mr. Mathews's sword; Mr. Mathews received him on his point, and I believe disengaged his sword from Mr. Sheridan's body, and gave him another wound; which, I suppose, must have been either against one of his ribs, or his breastbone, as his sword broke, which I imagine happened from the resistance it met with from one of those parts; but whether it was broke by that, or on the closing, I cannot aver.

Mr. Mathews, I think, on finding his sword broke, laid hold of Mr. Sheridan's sword-arm and tripped up his heels; they both fell; Mr. Mathews was uppermost, with the hilt of his sword in his hand, having about six or seven inches of the blade to it, with which I saw him give Mr. Sheridan, as I imagined, a skin-wound or two in the neck—for it could be no more, the remaining part of the sword being broad and blunt; he also beat him in the face either with his fist or the hilt of his sword. Upon this I turned from them, and asked Captain Paumier if we should not take them up;[4] but I cannot say whether he heard me or not, as there as a good deal of noise; however, he made no reply. I again turned to the combatants, who were much in the same situation: I found Mr. Sheridan's sword was bent, and he slipped his hand up the small part of it, and gave Mr. Mathews a slight wound in the left part of the belly: I that instant turned again to Captain Paumier, and proposed again our taking them up. He in the same moment called out, "Oh! he is killed—he is killed!"

"I as quick as possible turned again, and found Mr. Mathews had recovered the point of his sword, that was before on the ground,[5] with which he had wounded Mr. Sheridan in the belly; I saw him drawing the point out of the wound. By this time Mr. Sheridan's sword was broke, which he told us.

Captain Paumier called out to him, "My dear Sheridan, beg your life, and I will be yours for ever."

I also desired him to ask his life: he replied, "No, by God, I won't."

I then told Captain Paumier it would not do to wait for those punctilios (or words to that effect) and desired he would assist me in taking them up. Mr. Mathews most readily acquiesced first, desiring me to see that Mr. Sheridan was disarmed. I desired him to give me the tuck,[6] which he readily did, as did Mr. Sheridan the broken part of his sword to Captain Paumier. Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Mathews both got up; the former was helped into one of the chaises, and drove off for Bath, and Mr. Mathews made the best of his way to London.[7]

Relying on accounts from his son, Thomas Sheridan gave his version of the second duel in a letter dated July 9, 1772. It supplied some additional details, as well as minor contradictions:

> They had not exchanged three passes before they both closed in, both fell, and both their swords were broke. But my son's snapped across within four inches of the hilt and that of Mr. Mathews was only shivered in the middle, leaving a jagged point and running tapering up a great way of the blade.
>
> At first my son had the advantage in the fall, having thrown Mathews down, but as the ground happened to be sloping where they fell, [Mathews] rolled over him, and got uppermost. My son called out that he had nothing to defend himself with; the other holding the pointed part of the sword over him, which he had picked up from the ground, bid him beg his life. My son said he would never beg his life from such a scoundrel; Mathews then began to stab him, and my son after the first wound caught hold of one part of it, so as that [Mathews] could not disengage it. [Mathews] then proceeded to stab him with the jagged pointed sword which he held in the other hand, uttering horrid curses all the while. It is said that the number of stabs which he made as quick as possible, could not be less than twenty or thirty; my son had the good fortune to put by most of them with his hand, so that they only penetrated his coat, but five of them took place, fortunately all flesh wounds, having been stopped by the bones. Mathews then went off swearing that he had done for him.[8]

Mathews left Sheridan lying on the ground. The miniature of Eliza that Sheridan had worn around his neck was shattered, its frame later found in the pool of his blood. He was helped to a nearby shepherd's hut, where he drank some water and rested a while, and then was taken back to the White Hart Inn, where surgeons were sent for to dress his wounds.

The fight, coming on the heels of the previous one, created a sensation. Within a few days Sheridan was sitting up in bed and reading the newspapers—as he put it, eager to find out whether he was dead or alive. Soon he had recovered sufficiently to continue his convalescence at home, attended by his sisters.

Thomas Sheridan's letter of July 9 concluded:

> Never was more concern shown on any occasion than was here to be seen in all classes of people on my son's account; for he bears an excellent character, and is much beloved. And never were more execrations poured upon any head than that of the vile assassin. Never was a man so universally detested, and I do verily believe were he to appear in the streets of Bath by day, he would be stoned to death by the populace.[9]

After the duel Mathews made his way to France, where he waited for the matter to blow over. His flight was seen as clear evidence that he had behaved dishonorably, and Sheridan's heroic status was solidified. Spitefully, Mathews later described the duel "as a mere hoax—in fact, as no duel at all." He claimed that Sheridan was so drunk he could have killed him easily if he had chosen and that Sheridan left a pool not of blood, but of claret.

Eliza, though, had no qualms about her hero. She wrote him an adoring letter that gushed, in part, "Oh! my Horatio [her pet name for Sheridan], I did not know till now how much I loved you. Believe me had you died I should certainly [have] dressed myself as a man and challenged M[athews]. He should have killed me or I would have revenged you and myself. . . . God in

Heaven bless you my dearest Horatio and restore you once more to health and the arms of your Eliza."[10]

Richard and Eliza were formally married in 1773, still against Thomas Sheridan's wishes; father and son were not reconciled for years. Despite their romantic courtship, the marriage was not a happy one. The couple soon grew estranged. Sheridan carried on a long affair with the Duchess of Devonshire's sister, while Eliza was tempted by many suitors. As she wrote to a friend, "The world . . . is a bad one and we are both victims of its seductions."

Eliza died at 37 years of age in 1792, while Sheridan lived until 1816.

Outside of his duel with Sheridan, Mathews is best known for having written a popular manual on whist.

NOTES

1. A sword is in line when it is directed at the target area of the opponent.
2. Thomas Moore, *Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971) 1:57–59.
3. That is, draw the load from the pistols by pulling out the bullets and emptying the powder charge.
4. To take them up: to stop them from fighting.
5. Mathews picked up the broken-off tip of his sword and used it to stab Sheridan.
6. Tuck: a term that might loosely describe a rapier; it also referred to a type of sword that predated the rapier, a broader-bladed sword suitable for cutting as well as thrusting.
7. Moore, *Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Richard Brinsley Sheridan,* 1:63–65.
8. W. Fraser Rae, *Sheridan: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1896) 1:203–204.
9. Ibid., 204–205.
10. Ibid., 207.

10

WILLIAM WHATELY VS. JOHN TEMPLE

DECEMBER 11, 1773

In 1773, tension was high between England and its American colonies over issues of taxation and representation. When confidential letters between English officials pertaining to the crisis were published in a Boston newspaper, it added fuel to the fire, and accusations flew as to the source of the leaks.

The letters were part of a bundle of correspondence held by William Whately after the death of his brother, who had been secretary of the treasury. Member of Parliament John Temple had gotten permission to examine the correspondence sometime earlier, and Whately publicly expressed his suspicion that he had revealed their contents. Infuriated, Temple denied the charge and on December 11, 1773, sent Whately a challenge via a friend, Ralph Izard. The two men agreed to exchange shots with pistols later that same afternoon and, if this did not suffice, to fight with swords. They met at 4 P.M. in the Ring at Hyde Park. Whately had brought no second of his own, saying that he preferred to involve no other men in the quarrel, so Izard did not act as Temple's second but waited nearby.

Whately did not own dueling pistols, so Temple's were used. The duel was in the alternate-fire mode, with Temple firing first. Neither shot struck home. The men then engaged with their swords. Temple received a scratch on the hand and Whately a few cuts and punctures. Izard consented to take Whately to have his wounds dressed, though he considered him hardly injured at all.

In the carriage, Whately began to complain about the manner in which the duel had been fought. He said that although he had deloped,[1] Temple was not mollified but had drawn his sword. Furthermore, he claimed that he had twice disarmed Temple and told him to take his life, yet Temple continued to fight. Izard advised Whately to refrain from spreading such stories, lest he force Temple to renew their quarrel. This fell on deaf ears: not only did Whately make his charges public, but he further claimed that Temple had stabbed him twice in the back after he had fallen.

On December 18, Temple published his version of the events leading up to the duel and the duel itself. It read, in part:

> The gentleman [Ralph Izard] who waited upon Mr. Whately with my invitation, told him he would attend me as a second if Mr. Whately would have one on his part. Mr. Whately declined having any second, and therefore I brought none.
>
> He appeared at the place appointed with a sword only. I gave him one of my pistols. We discharged them mutually; mine being, at his request, the first, without effect. If his was not directed at me, it escaped my observation. I then drew my sword, and approached him—who had also unsheathed his—with a persuasion, grounded on his coming with a sword only when the choice of weapons was in him, that I was to encounter an adversary much superiour to myself in skill. I soon found my mistake; and, as far as I could reason in such a situation, determined,

by wounding him in the sword arm, to end the business without a fatal stroke. But my skill was not equal to my intention; it soon became a struggle, instead of a regular combat, and I could only avoid making a full lunge, which probably would have wounded him mortally. The contortions of my antagonist's body, during the struggle, exposed parts which in a regular encounter could never have been touched. When he turned himself to seize the blade of my sword with his left hand, I supposed he received the wounds in his left side; and in some violent effort his shoulder must have been exposed. The extreme smallness of the wound in that part being, as I am well informed, a mere puncture, proves it to have been accidental. Had my purpose been unfair, I should have taken the life that was in my power; had it been mortal, every wound would not have been superficial, and only one dangerous, not from its depth, but its direction.

I understand it has been said he was down. In such circumstances it is as impossible to account for everything that happens as to remember everything that passes. But of this I am very sure, that though he slipt once, he never fell.

It is proper to apprize the reader that I am unfortunately very deaf. If any words of accommodation, as has been represented, were really used by Mr. Whately, I did not hear them. They who expect coolness in the midst of such a conflict, and deliberation in the moment of a deadly point being at one's breast, require too much. It is well that the passion, which rises fast on such an occasion, did not alter imperceptibly my general determination not to push so forcibly as to make a deep wound. It is with confidence I can affirm I was not guilty of any unfair

> action, because I never had an unfair thought—nor of a cruel one, because my purpose was the reverse.
>
> I have received no bodily wound; but they whose minds can feel for consequences, which they could not with honour avoid, will understand me when I say that I have felt those wounds which far surpass in anguish every bodily pain.[2]

On January 7, 1774, Whately published his own account in the *Public Advertiser*. From the point after Izard delivered the challenge, it read:

> Unskilled, and altogether unpractised, as I make no scruple to declare myself in the use of arms, and the shortness of the time not admitting of any purposed preparation, I provided myself with the only weapon I had at hand, which is the reason, and the only reason, that I appeared on the spot with the sword only.
>
> Upon Mr. Temple's expressing himself that he presumed I had pistols about me, I told him I had not: but that if he was provided with firearms, I was willing to share his arms with him; and upon his fixing upon the spot, he delivered to me one of his pistols, and bid me take my distance. I retired a small space, and desired to receive his fire, which he gave me without effect. I then pointed my pistol in a line with my antagonist's body, but purposely raised considerably above his head.
>
> Mr. Temple then drew his sword; I did the same. He soon took occasion to observe to me that he perceived I was no swordsman, which I readily confessed. Early in the contest he seized my sword with his left hand, and bid me ask my life. I peremptorily refused, and a slight effort disengaged us. I

very soon had him at the same advantage. I had his sword secured in my left hand, and my own sword at liberty; when I bid him not to ask his life, but to take it unasked. We were again disengaged, and soon I once more availed myself of another opportunity to seize his sword, and again I bid him take his life unasked. He proceeded on each of these occasions as not hearing me, at least he made no reply. I am far from unwilling to make allowance for the infirmity of my opponent.

After this I made no further effort to seize his sword, but continued to act on the defensive only, though on several occasions many parts of his body appeared to my judgment to be unguarded, and, with security to myself, open to attack. My conduct was so obviously defensive that it was even noticed by Mr. Temple, to whom I made no other reply than that I should defend my life.

The contest continued; the countenance of my antagonist still sometimes bearing strongly the marks of passion and rage. It was, I presume, under some such unhappy, ungovernable influence, that late in the affair, and not long before we were parted, he declared he would put me to death. But in this part of my narrative, let me add, that he never seemed to make any long lunge at me.

One or two horsemen and some persons on foot were soon afterwards at no great distance, and making up to us, and my foot, in retreating, happening to slip, I fell first on my sword hand, and then on my left hand; and before I could recover myself, several persons were near to us. Mr. Temple stepped up to me, and said we should meet again, and even proposed then to withdraw.

I do not recollect that I returned any answer; in a

> little time Mr. Izard came up to us, and now finding my loss of blood was considerable, and that my breast was affected in a manner that made me draw my breath with difficulty, I accepted Mr. Izard's offer to take his coach, which was then in the Park, and near at hand, to convey me to Mr. Sanxay's, or Mr. Davenport's, my surgeons.
>
> In our way to Essex Street, on my mentioning to Mr. Izard some circumstances of the affair, and particularly my having twice hold of my adversary's sword, and the use I made of those situations, he suggested that it would be better to say nothing of the duel, alleging that Mr. Temple was a man of that violence of temper, that if any misrepresentations were to get abroad, which is always, more or less, the case, it might induce him to renew it.[3]

Whately included an affidavit from Davenport describing the five wounds that required dressing. These were two in the back and three in the front of the torso, with only one, to the pit of the stomach, potentially dangerous. Whately mentioned that the wounds to his back appeared to be the result of direct, rather than oblique, thrusts but declined to explicitly accuse Temple of unfair fighting, leaving the inference to be drawn by the reader. He concluded with the statement, "I have only to add, that as all sort of intercourse (whether hostile or amicable) between Mr. Temple and myself is at an end for the remainder of our lives, I hope and trust I shall never again have occasion to address the Public relative to this untoward event."[4]

Izard responded with an article claiming that he had never suggested that Temple was a man of violent temper; rather, he wrote, "I have always thought him a person of the strictest honour, and possessed of such proper spirit, as to chastise any man who should presume to countenance the suspicion of it."[5] Izard also recalled that Whately had not seemed to consider himself seriously wounded as he left the field, but was mainly concerned that the scratch on his face might alarm his mother, with whom he was dining that evening. As far as Whately's difficulty in drawing breath, Izard attributed that to "the unusual exercise in which he had just been engaged."

Temple also published a brief response, noting that he had already provided a full account of the affair and didn't care to repeat himself. With weary exasperation he concluded, "I shall only observe that Mr. Whately might have spared himself the trouble of writing the last paragraph of his narrative, as it has always been and still continues to be my determination to have as little concern and intercourse as possible with any but men of truth and honour. His friendship and enmity I hold in equal contempt."[6]

As far as the original provocation for the duel, it turned out that the leaked information had not come from letters held by Whately. The man who had revealed the information was the agent for the House of Representatives of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and he came forward to take full responsibility; his name, Benjamin Franklin.

NOTES

1. Delope: to fire intentionally into the air rather than at an opponent.
2. John Almon, *Biographical, Literary, and Political Anecdotes, of Several of the Most Eminent Persons of the Present Age* (London: T.N. Longman, and L.B. Seeley, 1797): 252–254.
3. Ibid., 261–264.
4. Ibid., 265–266.
5. Ibid., 266.
6. Ibid., 270.

11

DUELING IN THE ARMY OF NAPOLEON

1806–1815

Elzéar Jean-Louis Joseph Blaze was born in 1786 in Cavaillon, France, and attended the Fountainebleau Military School. He served in Napoleon's army from 1806 to 1815 and following that under the Restoration until 1819, retiring with the rank of captain. He wrote a memoir, *Recollections of an Officer of Napoleon's Army*, which contains a number of accounts of duels.

"*Bon duelliste, mauvais soldat*" [good duelist, bad soldier], Napoleon was fond of saying, and like most military commanders he resented losing his officers to personal disputes. However, the practice was rampant, and he was never able to suppress it.

The following is taken from Blaze's chapter entitled "The Fencing Masters and the Duelists."

In all regiments, there is a man whom the soldiers respect at least as much as their colonel, and this man is the fencing-master.[1] He has several lieutenants who, under the name of assistants, exercise a part of that moral authority which the great master delegates to them. On my arrival in the regiment, I requested M. Malta to give me lessons in his art which I knew very imperfectly, and he taught me by rule how one should go about it to kill his man without ever being killed. For, as M. Jourdain's master has so well put it: *The whole secret of fencing consists of two things: in giving and not receiving. Now, so as not to receive, turn the sword of your adversary from the line of your body, which only depends on a little motion of the wrist, either inward, or outward.*[2]

[M. Malta] had sought a quarrel with all the most famous of his time, and he had killed them by the dozen. I believe that he exaggerated the number of the dead somewhat; however, if one spoke in his presence of some celebrated fighter, I can affirm that his greatest desire was to measure himself with him. I was tractable at his lessons and he appeared very well pleased with my progress. "Lieutenant," said he to me one day, "if you continue this way, in two months I shall teach you politeness." By this he meant that he would teach me the salute and all the pretenses of courtesy that ordinarily precede a fencing match.

When we had reached the point where I could learn politeness, M. Malta always urged me to make big eyes while saluting: "Lieutenant, open your eyes, more . . . still more. When you salute, you must open your eyes like the crystal of a watch; you must show that you're present." When we wished to arouse his anger, we praised before him the fencing-masters of the other regiments; then M. Malta would shrug his shoulders as a sign of contempt, and always ended by saying: "Not one of those people would be worthy of sweeping my fencing-hall."

Among his assistants, Monsieur Dupré, a drummer, held a very distinguished place; he was his coadjutor, his successor, the heir-apparent of that great office. In the taverns, Dupré made the firstcomer buy him a drink, or else he invited the reluctant individual to follow him on the field *to refresh themselves with sword blows*; it was his favorite expression. Never did a more insolent and blustering personage wear the shako on his ear.[3]

"You see that cuirassier[4] drinking alone," said Dupré one day to his comrade L'Etoile, "wait a bit, I am going to *demolish* him."

"Be careful! should he fall on you, you would be crushed."

"My saber will compel him to fall on his back."

And Dupré, approaching, seizes the glass of the man with the jacket of steel and drinks down its contents without stopping to breathe. It is but right to tell you that a fighting foot soldier always prefers to pick a quarrel with a horseman; the horseman is his natural enemy. Among the men on horseback, he will choose the cuirassier, especially if the latter is very tall and stout; if he kills him, the act deserves greater praise.

"Comrade, you are making a mistake."

"Rather it is you who do not see clearly."

"You take me for someone else."

"Not at all, my dear, it is done on purpose."

"Then you are trying to pick a quarrel with me?"

"Of course; look, he is beginning to notice it."

"If I put you in my boot, it will serve you as a guardroom."

"Yes, but you have to put me in it first, and you will be dead before that happens."

"*Mille tonnerres!*" [A thousand thunderbolts!]

"No noise, my friend, softly, let us not shout;

between Frenchmen there is a way of settling matters; come this way to show me your boot."

"And my sword at the same time."

Five minutes after, the cuirassier was dead.

However, one fine day Dupré found his master: the sword of a young recruit ran him through. The news was brought to us; everybody was delighted to hear it; everyone said that the blackguard had only what he deserved. Nevertheless the surgeon-major betook himself on the field of battle; he wanted to withdraw the steel from the wound to apply a dressing; the thing was at first considered impossible, because the weight of the body in falling had bent the point of the sword. It was necessary to call the armorer who straightened it. The operation was a long one; the wretched fellow must have suffered horribly; nothing, however, appeared on his face; on the contrary, while jesting with those present, he urged the surgeon to do his duty well. The sword was withdrawn, the wound bandaged; Dupré remained two months in the hospital and then . . . he came out more of a blackguard than ever. One hundred thousand good people would have died of such a wound. Dupré did not. Besides, it is remarkable that all these fighters were ordinarily very bad soldiers; the man who, counting on his strength, seeks to pick a quarrel with the weak, is necessarily a coward. On the days of battles, these blusterers always had a new pretext for remaining behind; they were to be seen only the following day. A recruit in their place would have received *la savate*[5] but the "excuse" they offered—always at the point of the sword—closed the mouths of the whole company.

I have seen fencing-masters fight together seriously, without motive, without hatred, without a reason capable of causing a duel. They fought to try their strength; one of them was killed; the other strutted about adding one more triumph to his past exploits. I have seen two of these who in a match, quarreling over a denied pass,[6] of common accord left their foils for their swords, and fought in the presence of fifty spectators who allowed them to do it. "You will not deny that one!" said the victor as he ran his adversary through. It would be truly difficult to deny a sword thrust which pierced your chest. A fencing-master had placed over his door this singular sign: "Fighting here from ten to four." It was very convenient for the fencing enthusiasts: they were always sure to find a champion ready to face them. Like those knights of old who rode out ready to break a lance with anyone they met, my man awaited customers and gloried in their absence.[7]

NOTES

1. The position of regimental fencing master was not an official one. The master supplemented his soldier's pay with whatever he was paid for lessons.
2. M. Jourdain is the title character in Molière's comedy *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.* These famous lines were spoken by his fencing master in act 2, scene 2.
3. The shako was the plumed military headgear of the Napoleonic Wars. Wearing it "on his ear" suggests that Dupré wore his at a rakish angle.
4. Cuirassier: a cavalry officer who in the Napoleonic era still wore a steel breastplate.
5. When a soldier had proved himself a coward or otherwise disgraced himself, his comrades would give him 50 blows with a *savate* (an old shoe).
6. During foil practice a fencer was expected to acknowledge it when his opponent's tip touched him—the proverbial "touché." Denying a legitimate touch was akin to cheating at cards—it put a man beyond the pale.

7. Capt. Elzéar Blaze, *Recollections of an Officer of Napoleon's Army*, E. Jules Méras, trans., (New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1911): 95–102. Minor corrections and additions to text based on translation by John R. Elting (Chicago: Emperor's Press, 1995).

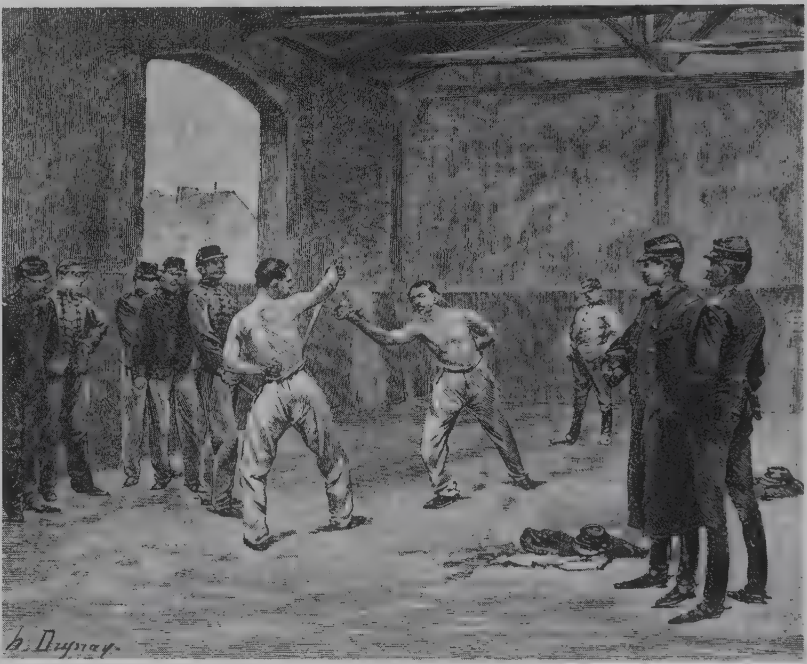
12

THE QUADRUPLE DUEL OF GEN. FERNANDO FERNANDEZ DE CÓRDOVA

1827

In his autobiography, *Mis Memorias Întimas*, Gen. Fernando Fernandez de Córdova, Marquis of Mendigorría (1809–1883), described an unusual quadruple duel he fought in his youth. His regiment was stationed in Zaragoza, in northeast Spain, where, as he wrote:

> The officers went to the theater, as in the other capitals of the province, and there were few who did not do it daily. The company had rehearsed the opera "The Barber of Seville," translated into Spanish, forming the orchestra with most of the regimental musicians. This was the fashionable opera in Zaragoza, and the manager, who had sold all the tickets to it, had left no seats for the officers on the night of the premiere, but only on those nights when nobody or very few people were going to the theater.
>
> That unfair decision disturbed us all, and that day, at the training camp, we agreed that no one would put a foot in the theater if we did not get complete satisfaction.



A saber duel in the French army.

We decided, in addition, that the musicians, whose wages we officers paid, would not participate in the orchestra, without which the opera could not be performed. In this last part Colonel Ezpeleta intervened, ordering that the musicians fulfill their commitment, which naturally increased our discontent.

Nevertheless, our resolution still stood of not going to the presentation, which was transmitted to the Colonel as well as to the other superiors.

We officers had gathered in the cafe as the performance began, when we learned that in the main floor of the theater were some officers of the Guard, who obviously had been able to obtain tickets by private and energetic efforts. This news exasperated everyone. I was charged to let the lucky people know about the resolution of the officer corps, and to demand their immediate exit from the theater. I did so, calling them by means of the ushers. There were seven of them there and they responded to my call. To all I presented the agreement of the other officers. Four left the premises, and three refused, being willing to accept the consequences, which I presented to them the following morning, after the roll call.

There was no putting such matters off, and I had my duels sooner than I might have wished. My three adversaries were in their positions already waiting for me the following morning. All of us had our seconds, and in an olive grove next to the castle I started the combat with a lieutenant of my company named Don Félix Ichazo, a Navarrese[1] and veteran officer from the absolutist ranks, a tough man, ill-natured, valiant and obstinate of character. He only aimed thrusts at my chest; I riposted with cuts to the head, which he was skillful enough to parry; but finally I was able to deliver one that forced him to sit down to catch his breath and bandage himself with his handkerchief. During the combat, Ichazo's second was shouting to encourage him, and this, which seemed to me inappropriate and in bad taste, moved me to challenge him too at that moment, to see if he would show the same spirit when he was in front of a sword. Ichazo seemed to me to be out of the combat; but, contrary to my hope and expectation, this was not so. He stood up and grasped his saber again, signifying his desire to continue. I had to comply, and the fight continued with a renewed spirit and the same technique; he directed only thrusts at me, and I directed cuts to his head. I delivered another hit on his right shoulder, which the Navarrese did not seem to notice, but a third hit, that struck him in the head, caused him to fall to the ground, like the first time, but not without having landed a thrust at my left nipple, which did nothing but raise my skin, though that caused me a painful contusion.

In view of that outcome the rest were of little importance. I gave one lieutenant a cut in the arm, and an ensign just a light cut on the right leg. It remained only to conclude with Ichazo's second, who gave me all sorts of satisfaction. He was a very obese officer and presented a great volume, on which there was plenty of target to exercise my saber, that truthfully at that time I handled with great skill.

Thus, I finished those challenges, which caused plenty of talk in Zaragoza, the echo of which arrived in Madrid, where news of my death spread. My family was very worried for some days, because at that time, being that mail was delivered only twice a week, and the telegraph not yet available for public service, there was no way to relieve their natural anxiety in this kind of situation. Once they knew the facts, my brothers got me a royal leave of absence, that I hurried to enjoy, marching with a group of Cavalry, commanded by the general, at that time ensign, Azlor, nephew of the Duke of Villahermosa and an intimate friend of mine. In Madrid, my brothers Don Jose and Don Luis welcomed me with kindness and affection, because they thought it was an extraordinary fact that I had had four duels in the same day, maintaining myself in all of them with some firmness of character; this was the spirit of the time, and they celebrated me for following in their footsteps, understanding that to maintain an elevated name there was no better way than dueling, for lack of a war in which to take part. These were the ways of a former age, in truth already put aside in the present society.

But it should not be imagined by those who read these memories that when referring to the dangerous misdeeds of my youth I am trying to present them as a personal virtue. Nothing could be farther from my intention. These incidents, on the contrary, were detrimental rather than favorable to me, giving me the reputation of a duelist and bad character, and forming a disadvantageous opinion before my superiors, who, if they did not impose severe punishments to me, it was only due to the prestige of my name and the well-known protection the King gave me and consequently all the royal family. Those first duels, which, in fact I did not promote, brought me many others that I did not want, because no one wanted to let anything pass with me, given the relative importance and spirit they granted me. On the other hand, I repeat, that was a time when duels were in fashion, creating in the officers of the Guard a special spirit that made it respectable and of an irresistible prestige. An officer who prudently avoided a duel would lose his reputation and ran the risk of his companions not wanting to socialize with him, and of seeing himself forced to retire from the service. How strange was it that I, young, with so little experience and judgment, having as models brothers of a great fierceness, who had endured terrible duels, wanted to imitate them in this way, since I could not match them in outstanding virtues and unique merits?[2]

NOTE

1. Navarra is a province of northern Spain, on the French border.
2. Marqués de Cabriñana del Monte, *Lances entre caballeros* (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1900): 159–165.

13

A DUEL IN 1830

The July Revolution of 1830, a few days of street insurrections in Paris that led to the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy, resulted in bitter animosity between Legitimists and Republicans. For the bretteurs, the duel was a continuation of politics by other means.

A portrait of one unidentified bretteur appeared in *Harper's Monthly* in an article entitled "A Duel in 1830." Although it observed the common 19th-century practice of indicating subjects' last names by initials and there is no way to authenticate it, the article is a realistic portrayal of the prevailing atmosphere. Even those elements that may seem overly theatrical to the modern reader, such as displaying the skull of a deceased relative, are true to the time.

It reads:

> I had just arrived in Marseilles with the *Diligence*, in which three young men, apparently merchants or commercial travelers, were the companions of my journey. They came from Paris, and were enthu-

siastic about the events which had lately happened there, and in which they boasted of having taken part. I was, for my part, quiet and reserved; for I thought it much better, at a time of such political excitement in the south of France, where party passions always rise so high, to do nothing that would attract attention; and my three fellow travelers no doubt looked on me as a plain, commonplace seaman, who had been to the luxurious metropolis for his pleasure or on business. My presence, it seemed, did not incommode them, for they talked on as if I had not been there. Two of them were rather gay, merry, but rather coarse boon companions; the third, an elegant youth, blooming and tall, with luxuriant black curling hair and dark soft eyes. In the hotel where we dined, and where I sat a little distance off, smoking my cigar, the conversation turned on various love adventures, and the young man, whom they called Alfred, showed his comrades a packet of delicately perfumed letters, and a superb lock of beautiful fair hair.

He told them that in the days of July he had been slightly wounded, and that his only fear, while he lay on the ground, was that if he died, some mischance might prevent poor Clotilde from weeping over his grave. "But now all is well," he continued. "I am going to fetch a nice little sum from my uncle in Marseilles, who is just at this moment in good humor, on account of the discomfiture of the Jesuits and the Bourbons. In my character as one of the heroes of July, he will forgive me all of my present and past follies; I shall pass an examination in Paris, and then settle down in quiet, and live happily with my Clotilde." Thus they talked together; and by-and-by we parted in the courtyard of the coach office.

Close by was a brilliantly illumined coffeehouse. I entered, and seated myself at a little table, in a distant corner of the room. Two persons only were still in the saloon, in an opposite corner, and before them stood two glasses of brandy. One was an elderly, stately, and portly gentleman, with a dark red face, and dressed in a quiet colored suit; it was easy to perceive that he was a clergyman. But the appearance of the other was very striking. He could not be far from sixty years of age, was tall and thin, and his gray, indeed almost white hair, which, however, rose from his head in luxurious fullness, gave to his pale countenance a peculiar expression that made one feel uncomfortable. The brawny neck was almost bare; a simple, carelessly knotted black kerchief alone encircled it; thick, silver-gray whiskers met together at his chin; a blue frock-coat, pantaloons of the same color, silk stockings, shoes with thick soles, and a dazzlingly white waist-coat and linen completed his equipment. A thick stick leaned in one corner, and his broad-brimmed hat hung against the wall. There was a certain convulsive twitching of the thin lips of his person, which was very remarkable; and there seemed, when he looked fixedly, to be a smoldering fire in his large, glassy, grayish-blue eyes. He was, it was evident, a seaman like myself—a strong oak that fate had shaped into a mast, over which many a storm had blustered, but which had been too tough to be shivered, and still defied the tempest and the lightning. There lay a gloomy resignation as well as a wild fanaticism in those features. The large bony hand, with its immense fingers, was spread out or clenched, according to the turn which the conversation with the clergyman took. Suddenly he stepped up to me. I was reading a Royalist newspaper. He lighted his cigar.

"You are right, sir; you are quite right not to read those infamous Jacobin journals." I looked up, and gave no answer. He continued: "A sailor?"

"Yes, sir."

"And have seen service?"

"Yes."

"You are still in active service?"

"No." And then, to my great satisfaction, for my patience was well-nigh exhausted, the examination was brought to a conclusion.

Just then, an evil destiny led my three young fellow travelers into the room. They soon seated themselves at a table and drank some glasses of champagne to Clotilde's health. All went on well, but when they began to sing the *Marseillaise* and the *Parisienne*, the face of the gray man began to twitch, and it was evident a storm was brewing. Calling a waiter, he said with a loud voice, "Tell those blackguards yonder not to annoy me with their low songs!"

The young men sprang up in a fury, and asked if it was to them he alluded.

"Whom else should I mean?" said the gray man, with a contemptuous sneer.

"But we may drink and sing if we like, and to whom we like," said the young man. "*Vive la République et vive Clotilde*!"

"One as blackguardly as the other!" cried the graybeard tauntingly; and a wine glass that flew at his head from the hand of the dark-haired youth was the immediate rejoinder. Slowly wiping his forehead, which bled and dripped with the spilled wine, the old man said quite quietly, "Tomorrow, at the Cap Verd," and seated himself again with the most perfect composure.

The young man expressed his determination to take the matter on himself; that he alone would settle the quarrel, and promised to appear on the morrow at the appointed time. They then all departed noisily. The old man rose quietly, and turning to me, said, "Sir, you have been witness to the insult; be witness also to the satisfaction. Here is my address; I shall expect you at five o'clock. Good night Monsieur l'Abbé! Tomorrow there will be one Jacobin less, and one lost soul the more. Good night!" and taking his hat and stick, he departed. His companion the abbé followed soon after.

I now learned the history of this singular man. He was descended from a good family of Marseilles. Destined for the navy while still young, he was sent on board ship before the Revolution, and while yet of tender years. Later he was taken prisoner, and after many strange adventures returned in 1793 to France; was about to marry, but having been mixed up with the disturbances at Toulon, managed to escape by a miracle to England; and learned before long that his father, mother, one brother, a sister of sixteen years of age, and his betrothed, had all been led to the guillotine to the tune of the *Marseillaise*. Thirst for revenge, revenge upon the hated Jacobins, was now his sole aim. For a long time he roved about in the Indian seas, sometimes as a privateer, at others as a slave dealer; and was said to have caused the tricolored flag much damage, while he acquired a considerable fortune for himself. With the return of the Bourbons he came back to France, and settled at Marseilles. He lived, however, very retired, and employed his large fortune solely for the poor, for distressed seamen, and for the clergy. Alms and masses were his only objects of expense. It may easily be believed that he acquired no small degree of popularity among the lower classes and the clergy. But, strangely enough, when not at church, he spent his time with the most celebrated fencing masters, and had acquired in the use of the pistol and the sword a dexterity that was hardly to be paralleled. In the year 1815, when the Royalist reaction broke out in La Vendée, he roved about for a long time at the head of a band of followers. When at last this opportunity of cooling his rage was taken from him by the return of order, he looked out for some victim who was known to him by his revolutionary principles, and sought to provoke him to combat. The younger, the richer, the happier the chosen victim was, the more desirable did he seem. The landlord told me he himself knew of seven young persons who had fallen before his redoubted sword.

The next morning at five o'clock I was at the house of this singular character. He lived on the ground floor, in a small, simple room, where, excepting a large crucifix, and a picture covered with black crêpe, with the date "1794" under it, the only ornaments were some nautical instruments, a trombone, and a human skull. The picture was the portrait of his guillotined bride; it remained always veiled, excepting only when he had slaked his revenge with blood; then he uncovered it for eight days, and indulged himself in the sight. The skull was that of his mother. His bed consisted of the usual hammock slung from the ceiling. When I entered he was at his devotions, and a little Negro brought me meanwhile a cup of chocolate and a cigar. When he had risen from his knees he saluted me in a friendly manner, as if we were merely going for a morning walk together; afterward he opened a closet, took out of it a case with a pair of English pistols, and a couple of excellent swords, which I put under my arm; and thus provided, we proceeded along the quay toward the port. The boatmen seemed all to know him: "Peter, your boat!" He seated himself in the stern.

"You will have the goodness to row," he said. "I will take the tiller, so that my hand may not become unsteady."[1]

I took off my coat, rowed away briskly, and as the wind was favorable, we hoisted a sail, and soon reached Cap Verd. . . .

My business was soon accomplished. It consisted in asking the young men what weapons they chose, and with which of them the duel was to be fought. The dark-haired youth—his name was M. L—— insisted that he alone should settle the business, and his friends were obliged to give their word not to interfere.

"You are too stout," he said to the one, pointing to his portly figure; "and you"—to the other—"are going to be married; besides, I am a first-rate hand with the sword. However, I will not take advantage of my youth and strength, but will choose the pistol, unless the gentleman yonder prefers the sword."

A movement of convulsive joy animated the face of my old captain: "The sword is the weapon of the French gentleman," he said; "I shall be happy to die with it in my hand."

"Be it so. But your age?"

"Never mind; make haste, and *en garde*."

It was a strange sight: the handsome young man on one side, overbearing confidence in his look, with his youthful form, full of grace and suppleness; and opposite him that long figure, half naked—for his blue shirt was furled up from his sinewy arm, and his broad, scarred breast was entirely bare. In the old man, every sinew was like iron wire; his whole weight resting on his left hip, the long arm—

on which, in sailor fashion, a red cross, three lilies, and other marks, were tattooed—held out before him, and the cunning, murderous gaze riveted on his adversary.

"'Twill be but a mere scratch," said one of the three friends to me. I made no reply, but was convinced beforehand that my captain, who was an old practitioner, would treat the matter more seriously. Young L——, whose perfumed coat was lying near, appeared to me to be already given over to corruption. He began the attack, advancing quickly. This confirmed me in my opinion; for although he might be a practiced fencer in the schools, this was proof that he could not frequently have been engaged in serious combat, or he would not have rushed forward so incautiously against an adversary whom he did not as yet know. His opponent profited by his ardor, and retired step by step, and at first only with an occasional ward and half thrust. Young L——, getting hotter and hotter, grew flurried; while every ward of his adversary proclaimed, by its force and exactness, the master of the art of fence. At length the young man made a lunge; the captain parried it with a powerful movement, and, before L—— could recover his position, made a thrust in return, his whole body falling forward as he did so, exactly like a picture at the Académie des Armes—"the hand elevated, the leg stretched out"—and his sword went through his antagonist, for nearly half its length, just under the shoulder. The captain made an almost imperceptible turn with his hand, and in an instant was again *en garde*.

L—— felt himself wounded; he let his sword fall, while with his other hand he pressed his side; his eyes grew dim, and he sank into the arms of his friends. The captain wiped his sword carefully,[2] gave it to me, and dressed himself with the most perfect composure. "I have the honor to wish you good morning, gentlemen: had you not sung yesterday, you would not have had to weep today," and thus saying, he went toward his boat.

"Tis the seventeenth!" he murmured; "but this was easy work—a mere greenhorn from the fencing schools of Paris. 'Twas a very different thing when I had to do with the old Bonapartist officers, those brigands of the Loire." But it is quite impossible to translate into another language the fierce energy of this speech.

Arrived at the port, he threw the boatman a few pieces of silver, saying, "Here, Peter, here's something for you."

"Another requiem and a mass for a departed soul, at the Church of St. Génviève—is it not so, captain? But that is a matter of course." And soon after we reached the dwelling of the captain.

The little Negro brought us a cold pasty, oysters, and two bottles of *vin d'Artois*. "Such a walk betimes gives an appetite," said the captain, gaily. "How strangely things fall out!" he continued, in a serious tone. "I have long wished to draw the crêpe veil from before that picture, for you must know I only deem myself worthy to do so when I have sent some Jacobin or Bonapartist into the other world, to crave pardon from that murdered angel; and so I went yesterday to the coffeehouse with my old friend the abbé, whom I knew ever since he was a field preacher to the Chouans, in the hope of finding a victim for the sacrifice among the readers of the liberal journals. The confounded waiters, however, betray my intention; and when I am there, no one will ask for a radical paper. When you appeared, my worthy friend, I at first thought I had found the right man, and I was impatient—for I had been waiting for more than three hours for a reader of the *National* or of *Figaro*. How glad I am that I at once discovered you to be no friend of such infamous papers! How grieved I should be, if I had had to do with you instead of with that young fellow!"

For my part, I was in no mood even for self-felicitations. At that time, I was a reckless young fellow, going through the conventionalisms of society without a thought; but the event of the morning had made even me reflect.

"Do you think he will die, captain?" I asked. "Is the wound mortal?"

"For certain," he replied, with a slight smile. "I have a knack—of course for Jacobins and Bonapartists only—when I thrust *en quarte*, to draw out the sword by an imperceptible movement of the hand, *en tierce*, or *vice versâ*, according to the circumstances; and thus the blade turns in the wound—*and that kills*, for the lung is injured, and mortification is sure to follow."[3]

On returning to my hotel, where L—— also was staying, I met the physician, who had just visited him. He gave up all hope. The captain spoke truly, for the slight movement of the hand and the turn of the blade had accomplished their aim, and the lung was injured beyond the power of cure. The next morning, early, L—— died. I went to the captain, who was returning home with the abbé. "The abbé has just been to read a mass for him," he said; "it is a benefit which, on such occasions, I am willing he should enjoy—more, however, from friendship for him, than out of pity for the accursed soul of a

Jacobin, which in my eyes is worth less than a dog's! But walk in, sir."

The picture, a wonderfully lovely maidenly face, with rich curls falling around it, and in the costume of the last ten years of the preceding century, was now unveiled. A good breakfast, like that of yesterday, stood on the table. With a moistened eye, and, turning to the portrait, he said: "Thérèse, to thy memory!" and emptied his glass at a draught. Surprised and moved, I quitted the strange man. On the stairs of the hotel I met the coffin, which was just being carried up for L———; and I thought to myself: "Poor Clotilde! You will not be able to weep over his grave."[4]

NOTES

1. A fencer of finesse might well limit his gross motor activity before a bout so as not to dull the light touch so necessary for proper point control.
2. Because of the high saline content of blood, it was important to wipe off a steel blade promptly to prevent it from rusting. In his handbook of dueling, "A Traveller" noted that he had a beautiful Toledo blade considerably damaged by a friend who returned it to its scabbard without wiping it after puncturing an opponent, adding, "During the confusion that necessarily arises upon a principal receiving the *coup de coeur*, such an accident is very likely to occur." *The Art of Duelling*, 31.
3. Moving the sword hand from quarte to tierce involves a half turn of the hand. Such a twist while the blade transpierced a man's chest would increase tissue damage, causing a quicker death through blood loss, air in the bloodstream, and asphyxiation as blood filled the lung. Twisting the blade also allows air through the chest wall, making it more likely that the lung would immediately collapse.
4. "A Duel in 1830," *Harper's Monthly* 5 (September 1852): 399–401.

14

CAPTAIN THIMÉCOURT VS. POULAGA

SPRING 1840

New Orleans, with its French heritage, was the only city in America where gentlemen routinely trained with the sword. In the 19th century, Exchange Street was lined with fencing academies, or *salles d'escrime*, where training was available for foil, broadsword,[1] épée, saber, and bowie knife. The *maîtres d'armes* were generally European imports, although at least three prominent masters were free blacks, who must have been talented indeed to have overcome the color barrier.

In the spring of 1840 a *grand assaut d'armes* was held at the Salle St. Philippe, a contest attended by most of the city's professional swordsmen. An account exists of one bout, between a master named Poulaga and Captain Thimécourt, a graduate of St. Cyr and the cavalry school at Saumur, both in France.

> But now all our attention returned to the stage. We had watched an Italian *maître d'armes* named Poulaga, a giant of a man, win several bouts handily. None, so it appeared, could match him with the broadsword until a Captain Thimécourt, a

former French cavalry officer, crossed blades with him. Ah, it was a fine day! When the bout was over, the Frenchman clearly had proved himself the other's equal if not his superior.

The big Italian was furious. He glared at his younger opponent and sneered. "You are tolerably good for a beginner," he taunted. "But after all you are only a *tireur de salle*—a club-room fencer."

The hall was tensely silent, as Thimécourt replied, "So? Well, I'll try you out on the field."

There was a rush for carriages and mounts to convey us to the Oaks.[2]

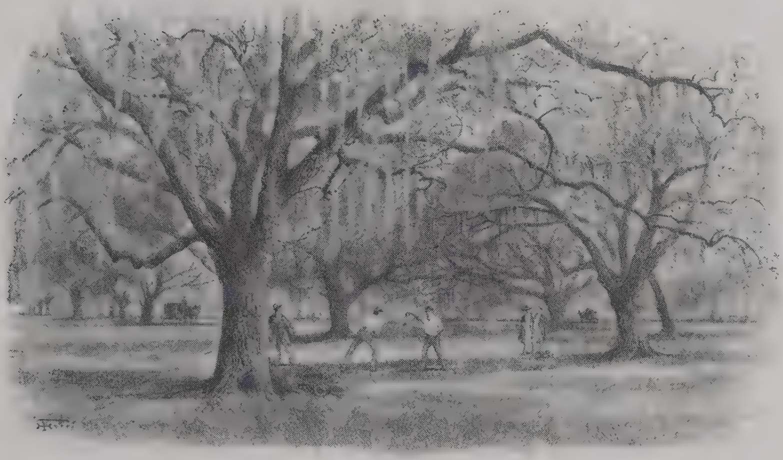
Nor was this the only such adjournment. No less than twenty duels between participants and spectators as well resulted from that *assaut d'armes.*

Withdrawn a proper distance, we spectators watched from among the trunks of the great trees on that familiar ground—many of us had fought there.

Seconds at their side, the duelists faced each other on the level sward—the huge Poulaga and Thimécourt. The former towered a head and more higher. His was the advantage in reach of sword arm and a strength that would make his broadsword cuts difficult in the extreme to parry. Though the captain, lighter and lither, had displayed a wrist of iron back there in the Salle St. Philippe, it seemed that the better weapon for him here would be the rapier or the smallsword.

A second proffered naked broadswords, not now the dulled weapons employed for fencing but with edges whetted keen. The principals drew them, tested their balance. Poulaga made his whistle through the air.

I had taken sides, monsieur. I liked not the great Italian's arrogance and the ill grace with which he had taken defeat in the contest. On the contrary, I



A duel under the Oaks.

admired the spirit of the captain of cavalry and his ready resentment of the other's insulting aspersion.

Seconds stepped back. The duelists rendered the prescribed salute.

"*En garde*," the referee called. Their broadswords crossed over his. Lowering his blade and retreating at once, he ordered, "*Jouez!*" [Play!] The duel commenced.

Well-tempered steel, striking its like, gives forth a gallant, ringing tone. The glade rang with the martial music it had so often echoed.

Poulaga, smarting from his humiliation, pressed the attack with venomous fury. Warily Thimécourt gave way. Poulaga leaped forward to deliver a slash at the head so terrific it must have split his opponent to the navel. It was such a blow as scarcely could have been parried. The Frenchman did not attempt to do so but stepped aside. The blade whirred past his right ear and shoulder. His own sword flashed back with a riposte *en carte* that narrowly missed slitting the big man's throat.

Poulaga raged. But he was too veteran a swordsman to permit his wrath to betray him into rash, bull-like rushes. He rained furious blows on his enemy but did not forget his guard. Cut and parry-riposte and counter-riposte. The eye could barely follow the swift play of the blades.

A red stain spread across Poulaga's chest. Few of us had seen him hit, so lightning fast had been Thimécourt's slash. Soon the Italian had another wound—a gash in his left flank. When the referee made as if to interpose, Poulaga bellowed at him. This, it had been agreed, was *combat à l'outrance* [to the death].

There was a moment's pause. It chanced that I glanced at the faces of my fellow spectators. They were flushed and rigid with blood-lust. So must have appeared the faces of spectators in the Roman Colosseum two thousand years ago when two noted gladiators, short swords dripping crimson, closed in for the kill.

The duelists circled. Again and again the giant Italian lunged to the attack. The captain, contenting himself with defense, retreated, parried, flashed back a rapid riposte. Visibly Poulaga was tiring. It is the legs that age first. When they weaken, a fencer has only a sword arm. That does not suffice. It can deliver a cut only against an adversary who remains within its reach.

Now Thimécourt took the offensive. He feinted, struck and slashed open the other's left cheek just below the eye. He beat up the Italian master's blade and scored with a *coup de pointe* [a thrust] in the belly. A gasp ran around the encircling audience but the giant seemed not to be badly hurt. His riposte slashed away half the rolled-up sleeve from the Frenchman's sword arm. A quarter of an inch closer, and Thimécourt would have been finished except for what defense he could have offered with a recovered blade in his left hand. He had not even been scratched, however. He returned to the attack vigorously, relentlessly.

We who watched now witnessed a man being slowly cut to pieces. When no vital spot is hit, it takes long to kill a large, strong man who cannot conceive either of defeat, or of surrender, or of death. This might have seemed simple butchery, if Poulaga had not continued to fight with undiminished fury—if he had not still been dangerous—if Thimécourt's cuts were not delivered with such admirable skill and finesse.

Of a sudden the end came. The cavalryman lunged and cut deep into the left side of the giant's neck, severing his jugular vein. As if one of the oaks about us had been felled, Poulaga toppled and crashed to the ground dead.

Monsieur, as I observed when I began my story, the broadsword can end an argument with complete and bloody finality. Clearly Captain Thimécourt had proved his superiority both in the *salle d'armes* and on the dueling ground.

We glanced at our watches. It was early still. Coachmen and grooms were called and we hastened back to the Salle St. Philippe to watch the remainder of the fencing.[3]

NOTES

1. Broadsword: a straight-bladed, double-edged, single-handed sword of the postmedieval period.

2. The Oaks was a parcel of public land outside the city, named for a grove of the stately trees. From 1834 on it was New Orleans' most popular dueling spot.
3. Fairfax Downey, *Our Lusty Forefathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947): 265–268.

15

BARON DE DEUKHAUS VS. DE BONNHART

JUNE 29, 1846

Over the centuries that dueling was in vogue, there were numerous efforts to restrain it by setting up "honor courts," assemblages of peers to adjudicate matters of honor. The idea never took hold, being flawed in concept: duels were fought to demonstrate a man's courage and the primacy in which he held his honor, while appealing to a court made him appear weak and irresolute.

Germany established an honor court for military officers in 1843, which would only authorize a duel if a matter could not be resolved peacefully. An account of one such duel dates from 1846:

> Two young officers, the Baron de Deukhaus, a lieutenant in the 11th Regiment of Hussars, and M. de Bonnhart, also a lieutenant in the 13th Infantry, had, whilst playing at billiards in a coffee house at Munster, a violent dispute, in which M. de Deukhaus made use of several offensive expressions towards his adversary.

These words having been uttered in a public place, and before a great number of witnesses, M. de Bonnhart felt himself under the necessity of demanding public satisfaction, and to this effect cited M. de Deukhaus to appear before the tribunal of honor sitting at Munster. It is known that for the last two years tribunals of this description are instituted in all the divisions of the Prussian army.

This tribunal, conformably to the law, used all its efforts to induce the offending party to retract the offensive expressions, and not being able to succeed, came to a decision that, considering the words in question attacked the honor of M. de Bonnhart, the latter could no longer continue in the army without having obtained public satisfaction; and considering that M. de Deukhaus obstinately refused to grant him such satisfaction, the tribunal authorized a duel between the two parties, according to the military rules.

The duel took place on Monday, June 29, at three o'clock in the afternoon, in a plain situated to the north of the city of Munster. A platform was erected in the middle of the plain, on which was seated the tribunal, the judges of the combat.

Before the tribune, a large space, surrounded by ropes supported by staves, was reserved for the combatants. Some detachments of infantry and cavalry were placed round the enclosed ground and tribune of the judges. At an early hour an immense crowd filled the vast plain, in order to witness the strange contest which was about to take place.

At three o'clock precisely the judges, wearing their uniforms, took their places in the tribune. They again attempted to effect a reconciliation, and this attempt also failing, authorized the combat to take place.

It was agreed upon by the two adversaries, with the sanction of the tribunal, that the combat should take place with cavalry swords, and be continued until one of the adversaries became hors de combat, and that both should fight with their heads uncovered and in their shirt sleeves.

A certain number of sabres were then brought forward, and the two adversaries, after having bound their eyes, took by chance their weapons. Then taking off the handkerchiefs from their eyes, as well as their coats and hats, they put themselves in an attitude of defence, and at a signal given by the president of the tribunal, the combat began.

MM. de Deukhaus and de Bonnhart fought with the greatest obstinacy. The latter successively received two slight wounds in the arm, but soon afterwards wounded his adversary so severely in the thigh, as to render it impossible for the latter to continue the combat.

When the surgeons had dressed the wounds of the officers, the president of the tribunal again attempted to reconcile them; this time he was immediately obeyed, and the two adversaries embraced each other. The public, which had throughout the combat observed the profoundest silence, hailed the reconciliation with loud and continued applause. Two coaches took away the late opponents, and M. de Bonnhart assisted in carrying M. de Deukhaus to his. The tribunal then separated, and the crowd quietly dispersed.

It is the first time that a tribunal of honor in Prussia has ever authorized a duel. All the disputes which had been hitherto brought before the tribunal, had invariably terminated by a reconciliation.[1]

NOTE

1. "Lawful Duelling," *Living Age* 10 (26 September 1846): 622–623.

16

HENRI DE PÈNE VS. LIEUTENANTS COURTIEL AND HYENNE

MAY 14, 1858

By the 19th century, it was considered improper to force a man to fight two sword duels in succession, especially if his second opponent had witnessed the first encounter. As Bazancourt explained:

> In a duel with swords there are two things you want to know: first, what is your opponent's natural temper when he is fighting in earnest; secondly, what is the character of his play and the quality of his swordsmanship. No one can deny that it is very advantageous to know whether the man that you have to face is impatient and excitable or self-possessed and cool; whether he will attack you with resolution or play a waiting game; whether he will attempt to parry or simply offer his point; whether he is energetic or the reverse, skillful or clumsy, an ugly customer or not particularly formidable. The fact of your presence at a previous encounter is sufficient by itself to give you information on all these heads. . . . You have been over the ground and know how the land lies.[1]

This ethical point was much discussed in the furor following the double duel in which Henri de Pène, the 28-year-old editorialist for *Le Figaro*, was nearly killed.

In a report on an elegant soiree published on May 6, 1858, de Pène had written: "A marked progress has been made. The inevitable sublieutenant in uniform, who tears ladies' laces with his spurs, and makes a *razzia* [raid] on the refreshments—the plague, the inevitable plague of the drawing room—was not there! People may invite him once, but never twice."[2] The following day he received scores of challenges from outraged sublieutenants.

De Pène accepted the challenge of M. Courtiel, of the 9th Chasseurs, in garrison at Amiens. The meeting was arranged for the afternoon of May 14 at the Bois de Vesinet, near St. Germain, outside Paris. Courtiel arrived with a retinue of more than 40 officers. His seconds were two fellow officers of his regiment, a M. Hyenne[3] and M. Rogé. After less than a minute of fencing, de Pène inflicted a wound on Courtiel's forearm, and Courtiel was unable to continue. De Pène then apologized for his published remarks, and Courtiel declared himself satisfied. At that point, as de Pène prepared to depart the field, the 45-year-old Hyenne, said to be a regimental fencing master, strode up to him and introduced himself. "I also, monsieur, wrote to you on the subject of your article," he said, "and I signed my name to my letter. Do you remember it?"

"Yes, monsieur, I do," responded the journalist.

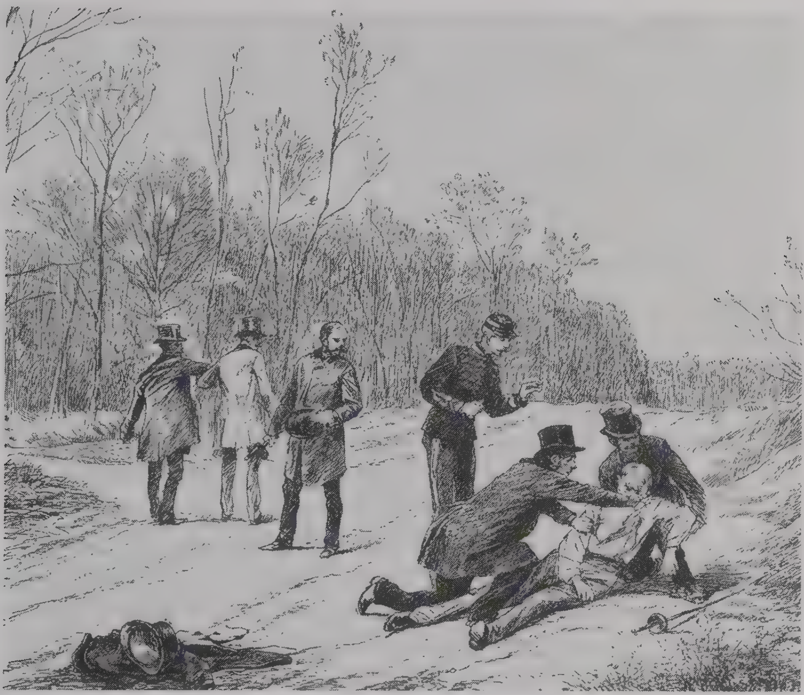
"Then you owe me satisfaction, and I demand it of you," said the officer.

"But it would be very difficult for me to fight with all the officers of the army," said de Pène.

"You have insulted them all, and they have the right to force you to draw the sword," said Hyenne.

"I refer you to my seconds," answered de Pène.

De Pène's seconds argued that their man should have to duel no more that morning, but Hyenne was determined to fight, and he said that if de Pène refused he should be under the



A duel with serious consequences.

painful necessity of insulting him. When de Pène continued to demur, Hyenne slapped him in the face with his glove.

De Pène asked his seconds how he should respond, and they replied that he must fight, though one of them observed that it was unfair that de Pène should have to go against an adversary who had just had an opportunity to study his technique.

Hyenne, who had come prepared with a case of pistols, allowed de Pène his choice of weapons. De Pène chose to continue with the sword.

Soon after the fight began, Hyenne dropped his opponent. De Pene's seconds initially assumed that his two wounds were the entry and exit of a single thrust, but, in fact, he had been hit twice, once in the right side, just below the nipple, and again on the left, near the heart. The report of the subsequent judicial inquiry stated that "Hyenne, fearing a parry and thrust, and not being fully aware that he had wounded his adversary in the right side, had instantaneously made a second thrust, to which de Pène, by a sudden change of position, had presented the left side."[4]

The surgeon rushed to de Pène's assistance, asking his second, M. de Rovigo, how deep the wound might be.

"Judging from the blood marks on M. Hyenne's sword, it must be 20 centimeters," responded de Rovigo.

Measuring the blood mark on his blade, Hyenne corrected him: "Not more than 15."

De Pène lay on the ground, blood pouring from his wounds "as through the spout of a teapot." The surgeon attempted to revive him by therapeutic bleeding, as odd as that sounds. At 4:00 P.M., after he had lain on the ground for an hour, it began raining. De Pène was placed on a shutter and taken to a nearby inn at the Pont de Pecq, where he was set up in a cramped room with a leaking ceiling. He was not expected to survive. His wife of six months was summoned and fainted at the sight of him.

Even as de Pène struggled for his life, an officer from Melun dropped by the offices of *Le Figaro* and menacingly asked to see him. When told he was recuperating in the vicinity of the Pont de Pecq, the officer went there to find him, but his inquiries caused him to be "roughly received by some workmen assembled, and he narrowly escaped being pitched into the Seine."[5]

Two officers from the Guides, Grangier and de Comminges, who reportedly had a hostile meeting arranged with de Pène for May 15, took a more gentlemanly approach, withdrawing their challenges and wishing him a speedy recovery.[6]

For weeks de Pène hovered at the brink of death, passing in and out of fevers. It was believed his liver had been pierced. He remained at the inn, despite its poor facilities, as he was in such intense pain his doctors feared that a move might kill him. Several times his death was announced prematurely.

Hyenne was a hero to his fellow officers, but the general public held him in contempt, feeling that he had violated the fairness that was fundamental to the duel. Rule 15 of Chatauvillard's code states, "No challenge can be sent by collective parties. If any body or society of men have received an insult, they can only send an individual belonging to it, to demand satisfaction." It appeared that, as the *Spectator* put it, "instead of being an appeal to equal-handed combat, to a sense of honor and chivalrous feeling, [dueling] amounts to an arrangement by which a certain class can pronounce sentence of death upon every man who offends it."[7]

The duel aroused strongly antimilitary feelings. The French minister of war, seeking to defuse the situation, confined all sublieutenants to their barracks and forbade them writing letters to newspapers. Hyenne was the subject of a military inquiry, but he was acquitted of any wrongdoing.

De Pène took weeks to recover. He would later joke that he became so well known for his wounds that for years people would enter his presence on tiptoe and speak in whispers as if they were in a sickroom. On the positive side, he observed, from that moment on his place was secured in Parisian journalism.[8] Upon his recovery he started a journal called *Le Revenant*, or *Ghost*.

NOTES

1. Bazancourt, *Secrets of the Sword,* 191.
2. "The Late Duel in Paris," *Times* (London), June 17, 1858, p. 5, col. 6.
3. Sometimes spelled Hyène. Much was made of the irony of the name: *hyène* is French for hyena.
4. "The Late Duel in France," *Times* (London), June 17, 1858, p. 5, col. 6.
5. *Daily Telegraph*, May 21, 1858, p. 5, col. 1.
6. Ibid., May 20, 1858, p. 5, col. 1.
7. "The Hyène Duel," *Living Age* 58 (July 10, 1858): 115.
8. Wirt Sikes, "Parisian Newspaper-men," *Appleton's Journal* 1 (August 1876): 125.

17

DILLON VS. DUC DE GRAMONT-CADEROUSSE

OCTOBER 22, 1862

Apologists for the duel were sometimes asked how they could justify pitting a man who had never held a sword against one who was well trained in its use. The question assumed a special piquancy after the 1862 duel in which a Mr. Dillon lost his life to the duc de Gramont-Caderousse.

Dillon was a 32-year-old Englishman who edited a Parisian journal called *Le Sport*, and Gramont-Caderousse was an aristocrat who frequented the track. In a series of articles and letters to the editor, the two had gotten into an escalating war of words over whether a certain jockey was entitled to be described as "a gentleman rider." Gramont-Caderousse insisted that he was not and observed, "It is also curious to see Mr. Dillon make himself a judge of the qualifications of a gentleman. Where, in fact, could he have acquired them?"

Considering his honor to be under attack, Dillon issued a challenge. As the *Daily Telegraph* noted facetiously, "The Duke at first pleaded his high rank, and alleged that he was not bound to fight Mr. Dillon. He was probably ignorant of the Irish axiom which for duelling purposes holds every man a gentleman who puts on a clean shirt once a week."[1]

After some negotiation, swords were chosen as the weapon, and the duel arranged for October 22. The parties traveled by train to Maisons, and from there by carriages to the forest of St. Germain. Rain was falling heavily as they reached the grounds. It took the seconds some time to find a suitable spot. Gramont-Caderousse won the choice of position, but gave Dillon the more favorable one and himself faced into the wind.

A newspaper report describes the duel: "M. Dillon took the offensive, attacked vigorously *en tierce,* and on his third pass received under his arm, between his fifth and sixth ribs, a thrust that penetrated to the depth of seven inches and passed through his left lung. He put his hand to his breast, sighed deeply, and fell dead."[2]

Pujol, a Parisian *maître d'armes*, had been walking in the woods nearby and witnessed the scene. He described it for James Pemberton-Grund: "'*Cré-nom*,' said I to myself, 'something's up.' They were *alignés*, ready to begin. 'Go,' said the seconds. *L'Anglais*, he jump in the air; so Monsieur le Duc he take a step back—so, and *ratatapang*" (an expression not in the dictionary but always used by Pujol to point a thrilling story) "the other fall forward—so. They pick him up—dead; *un brave*, but no fencer."[3]

At the sudden demise of his opponent, Gramont-Caderousse paled. To his seconds, he murmured, "I have no luck. For the first time it is not me who is wounded." To Dillon's seconds, he said, "I think my place is no longer here; I have nothing left me but to retire." One of Dillon's seconds, Colonel de Noé, took the body to a nearby inn and notified the police. De Noé initially refused to give the police any particulars of the duel, until they warned him that by doing so he would bring full legal responsibility upon himself.

A judicial hearing was held some weeks later. In the following exchange, the duke denied having sought any unfair advantage:

Q: To come to the choice of weapons, as the so-called world of dueling has its laws, the choice of weapons belongs to the offended party. M. Dillon's seconds have maintained that he was not the aggressor. Your seconds insisted upon the sword, and it is certain, and has been proved, that Dillon had never handled a sword or a foil. Were you aware of that discussion?

A: I only knew it after the duel had been settled.

Q: Could you not, generously, have not insisted on the choice of weapons?

A: Having once entrusted the care of my honour in the hands of my seconds, I had no right to appear until the meeting took place.

Q: But supposing you had the right of selecting the weapons, you might also have renounced a right which you say belonged to you?

A: If M. Dillon was a bad swordsman, I am equally so.

Q: How so? You have frequented fencing rooms, especially that of M. Pons.[4] You have been previously engaged in two duels, and have crossed swords before.

A: Yes. I have been wounded in two previous encounters from my want of skill.

Q: However it may be, you have handled a sword before, and your opponent was a man who never held a sword in his hand.

A: Mr. President, do you think it would have been more just to place me opposite to a man who was notoriously known as a crack shot with the pistol?

Q: There is nothing in the investigation to indicate that Dillon was such a shot as you would represent him.[5] The truth is, you deemed yourself the offended party, and that you consequently had the choice of weapons. When you chose the sword, when you were told that Dillon was no swordsman, what did your second say? "So much the worse for him,—he must fight with the sword. We will give him up to 5 o'clock to reflect. If he refuses, we will treat him as a snob, and turn him off the turf and out of every club in the world."

Colonel de Noé, Dillon's second, gave this account:

Mr. Dillon insisted on fighting. He said he was a lost man, dishonoured, and thrown out of bread. . . . He said, "Colonel, do not abandon me; I have made up my mind to everything; I will accept the sword." I then informed those gentlemen [Gramont-Caderousse's seconds] that we accepted the sword. I asked them if they had any objection to my asking Dillon to take a lesson from a fencing master, as he had never handled a sword before. They replied, "Let him practise as much as he likes until tomorrow."

I then took him to Pons the fencing master. On being informed what duel was to come off he declined giving him a lesson, as M. de Gramont-Caderousse was his pupil, and he could not give a lesson to his adversary. I then took Dillon to Gâtechair.[6] Dillon received one lesson from the elder Gâtechair and two from the son. M. Gâtechair, a practical man, observed that there was a fencing room and a duelling ground, and that, with two or three lessons, Dillon might and ought to kill M. de Gramont-Caderousse

> without any trouble. Gâtechair endeavoured to teach Dillon *tierce* and *quarte.*[7] The poor fellow could not make anything of it. Gâtechair told him to place himself *en tierce* rather than *en quarte.* Gâtechair said to me, before the duel, "Colonel, you are going; those gentlemen must have some respect for you. When on the ground endeavour to place your man *en tierce*, because if placed *en quarte* he is a dead man."
>
> I told him I should endeavour to do so.
>
> We arrived at the forest of St. Germain, on the ground, about 1 o'clock. . . . I said to Dillon, "You know your game; attack *en tierce*, and then parry; Caderousse will make a lunge at you and you can then run him through like a spit through a lark." . . . Dillon followed my advice at first, but he made a flourish. The Duke had then only to thrust and poor Dillon fell a corpse.[8]

The *Daily Telegraph* considered the duel tantamount to murder:

> In a duel with small swords between an Englishman and a Frenchman, the former, in nine cases out of ten, can as little protect himself from the onslaught of his adversary as a lamb from the knife of the butcher. Englishmen are first-rate hands at hard knocks and slashing blows; but, as a rule, they are not skilled in the *carte* and *tierce*, and the reason demonstrative.[9] Among cavalry officers even, to a dozen who could cleave down a foe with a sabre there are not three who could "pin" his antagonist in the dexterous style of a French swordsman. . . . We hope there has been no foul play in this business; but we confess that we cannot repress a shudder at reading that the unfortunate Dillon was run

> through the heart. Even the abominable duello has its laws of courtesy and chivalry. To *vises droit au coeur*—straight to the heart—in a venial quarrel, is held among all gentlemen scandalous. When the gravamen of offense is light, it is considered sufficient either to disarm one's opponent or to "chastise" him by running him through the sword arm. . . . The only possible excuse to be found for such a death-wound would be that Dillon, like many other inexperienced fencers, relied on his mere physical strength and on the impetuosity of his assault, and that the Duke, hard pressed by a furious albeit clumsy foe, was forced to thrust where he could, and to thrust home.[10]

Gramont-Caderousse was unrepentant. "No one more than myself can deplore the termination of the duel," he told the court of inquiry. "But I have the conscience of having acted according to the laws of honour, and of having done everything to avoid this unfortunate affair."

The court felt otherwise and ordered him to pay Dillon's wife an annual stipend of 3,600 francs, a common penalty in cases of this sort.

Gramont-Caderousse survived his opponent by only three years, dying in September 1865, "when quite a young man, after a short career of dissipation."[11] As the last representative of his line, his title died with him.

NOTES

1. *Daily Telegraph*, October 27, 1862, p. 4, col. 6.
2. H. de Villemessant, "Duel de MM. Gramont-Caderousse et Dillon," *Le Figaro*, October 26, 1862, p. 5, col. 1.
3. Grund, "The Duel of the Period in France," 780.
4. Alphonse Pons, a top fencing master in Paris.

5. A letter from Dillon's uncle was published, categorically stating that Dillon had no particular expertise with firearms. There were no pistols among his personal effects. See the *Times* (London), October 30, 1862, p. 10, col. 2.
6. Gâtechair was considered to be in the second tier of fencing masters.
7. Tierce and quarte are positions of the sword hand, each of which is connected with a different line of attack or defense.
8. "The Recent Duel in Paris," *Times* (London), November 12, 1862, p. 12, col. 3.
9. The "reason demonstrative" is a term from the Spanish school of swordsmanship, which laid out geometric principles of fencing that, if understood correctly, were supposed to make victory almost a mathematical certainty. The reference is to a line from Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*: "Are you mad, to go and quarrel with a man who understands *tierce* and *quarte*, and who knows how to kill another by the reason demonstrative?"
10. *Daily Telegraph*, October 27, 1862, p. 4, col. 6.
11. *Times* (London), June 24, 1869, p. 10, col. 3.

18

OLLIVIER VS. FEUILHERADE

MARCH 18, 1876

In 1866 France passed a law authorizing the prosecution of duelists even if they fought on foreign soil. The law was not enforced for 10 years, until charges were filed against the survivor and seconds of a fatal duel fought with complete disregard for the code of honor. The case attracted widespread interest, and the following is from a French news account:

> Last March 18 an encounter with the sword took place close to Longwy across the French border on foreign territory between M. Feuilherade, attended by MM. Lepelletier and Gaillard, and M. Ollivier, attended by MM. Chapron and Véron. After four successive engagements it ended with the death of Ollivier.
>
> The victim of this duel was a young man who led a highly irregular life. He had an extremely violent nature, and in his later days his instability was increased by a variety of difficulties. His fortune was long since compromised, and his relations with a

loose woman increased his financial difficulties. He was married in April 1875, but some months afterwards he was separated. Even while he was married, he never broke off relations with his former mistress,[1] and as he did not trust her, he became jealous. Last February, he challenged and injured an officer [Lieutenant Delaunay of the Cuirassiers] who, after meeting this woman in a public place, became intimate with her. As for Feuilherade, he had met Ollivier's mistress in September 1875 in Étretat, and for four months had had rather frequent relations with her. Considering himself personally outraged, Ollivier developed a burning resentment which he sought, by all means possible, to avenge in blood.

Feuilherade was out of town when he was warned by a friend of Ollivier's hostility toward him. He came to Paris on March 15 to give his opponent the satisfaction that was said to be his right. Feuilherade was going to duel for the first time; two twenty-five year olds, MM. Lepelletier and Gaillard, agreed to be his seconds. This was a mistake on their part, for they were as utterly inexperienced as he was in affairs of this sort.

As for Ollivier, he had already dueled eleven times. He was seconded by MM. Chapron and Véron, who had served him in that role previously and who were experienced, especially Chapron, who had attended more than twenty affairs and to whom Ollivier recently had given a pair of swords as a souvenir of what he called their fellowship of the dueling field.

It was Chapron who took the leading role in the negotiations before the duel, and who was the least open to reconciliation. On March 15 he wrote to demand an interview with the seconds of

Feuilherade, and in his letter he made a point of announcing that a duel was nearly inevitable. On March 16, the four seconds got together at the home of Chapron, who, together with Véron, determined the conditions of the duel and composed the *procès-verbal*.

To remove any possibility of conciliation, he declared that Ollivier had been gravely outraged (though he knew perfectly well that this was in reality a futile duel),[2] and he inserted an uncommonly rigorous clause: "The fight will stop only when there is unanimous opinion that a wound has made it impossible for one of the two opponents to hold a sword." Chapron also did not want to have doctors on the ground and wanted each fighter to cover his hand and forearm with a special armored gauntlet to prevent minor injuries.[3] However, Feuilherade's seconds did not accept these two last conditions. The dueling sword was chosen by common agreement and the duel was arranged to take place at the border.

The two opponents and their seconds left Paris on March 17 and arrived at Longwy on the 18th in the morning. Immediately one went to look for two doctors and, accompanied by them, the group crossed the border in three carriages. After following a long circuitous route, Chapron stepped out of one of the carriages and stopped the two others, saying: "We will have the fight here, the terrain is excellent." Everyone then walked to the ground; each of the two opponents had brought a matched pair of épées. With a flip of a coin Feuilherade's pair was chosen, but Chapron, finding them insufficiently sharp at the point, insisted that those belonging to Ollivier be used, and the fight was on.

After the first pass, Gaillard intervened, as

Ollivier had been lightly touched on the arm. Ollivier said it was nothing and insisted on continuing. At the second pass, Ollivier was disarmed by a parry of his opponent; a third engagement took place and soon was suspended, because Ollivier had expended so much energy that he had to take a break to catch his breath.

Finally, the two fighters took their *en garde* positions for the last time; Ollivier attacked with an extreme impetuosity and, lunging without parrying, threw himself on the point of his adversary's sword which struck him squarely in the chest and pierced his right lung. At the same time, he himself dealt Feuilherade a rather serious injury to the right side. Ollivier had remained standing, but he collapsed all of a sudden and soon took his last breath.

As for Feuilherade, he recovered promptly enough, and had returned to Paris 15 days later. In the evening Ollivier's body was transported to the hospital of Longwy. Doctors Boucher and Guerdès verified that the right side of his abdomen was protected by a wide belt fitted with steel plates that, to their knowledge, resembled none of the commonly used bandages in surgery. Chapron explained that his friend suffered from an umbilical hernia that this belt was designed to compress, but the doctors' examination revealed no trace of such an infirmity.

Information from other sources indicated that Ollivier had a habit of putting a belt under his clothing whenever he dueled. As early as 1859, he had told his friends about such a thing before an encounter with the pistol. His mistress herself attached it around his kidneys before one duel.

Last February 12, in another meeting [the one with Delaunay], when his opponent thrust at him,

> his sword bent back, as if it had struck a hard object that it had been unable to penetrate.
>
> Chapron and Véron had seconded Ollivier on that day as well. They were not chastened by that incident, and Chapron himself went so far as to straighten out the blade so that the combat could continue.[4]

A trial was held on August 4, 1876, at the Assize Court of the Seine. At the end of it the judge gave his final instructions, and the jury withdrew to the deliberating room. After half an hour, it returned a verdict of innocent on all counts for all of the accused.

NOTES

1. Identified in court as Adrienne Buisseret, whom Ollivier had met in May 1871 and to whom he gave a monthly allowance of 1,000 to 1,200 francs.
2. To fight over the honor of a prostitute would be considered an absurd or "futile" duel.
3. That is, to prevent the minor wounds to the hand or forearm that usually ended a duel. Chapron's excuse for imposing such a condition was that "if there had been a slight injury, it would be necessary to duel again in 15 days; this would be unpleasant."
4. "Affaire Ollivier-Feuilherade; homicide par imprudence; cinq accuses," *Le Temps*, August 4–5, 1876, p. 3, col. 5.

19

BARON GIOVANNI NICOTERA VS. FRANCESCO LOVITO

DECEMBER 7, 1883

Even in the well-regulated sword duels of the late 19th century, an affair could quickly get out of the control of the seconds. Such was the case in Italy in 1883, when former Minister of the Interior Baron Giovanni Nicotera, 55, fought the incumbent Minister of the Interior Francesco Lovito, 51.

Nicotera had taken it as a personal affront when Lovito had appointed one of Nicotera's political enemies to a top position. Confronting Lovito in the lobby of the Chamber of Deputies, he grossly insulted him and spat in his face. Several deputies separated the men, and Lovito subsequently sent Nicotera a challenge.

There was a heated discussion over the choice of weapons. Lovito's seconds preferred sabers, but Nicotera's friends, thinking their man weak in the right hand, held out stubbornly for pistols. It was finally agreed to settle the matter by drawing lots, and fortune favored Lovito.

Each man had two seconds; of the four, three were members of parliament. The fight was arranged for 11 A.M. on December 7, 1883, the terms as follows: sabers; thrusts as well as cuts permitted; chest and arms uncovered; no protection for the wrist;

to continue until one man was no longer physically able to handle his weapon.

The duel took place at the garden of a villa close to the Prati di Castello, on the banks of the Tiber. Several pairs of sabers were brought to the grounds, and a particularly fine set belonging to Baron di San Giuseppe was chosen. Nicotera and Lovito were put in position, each with his seconds standing at his right hand, one ahead and one behind him. The director of the fight gave them final instructions, telling them that they must not use their left hands, either in defense or offense, that they must immediately obey the command "halt," as well as "on guard" and "forward," and concluded with, "Whatever the reasons that brought you here, remember that your conduct on the ground must be that of two gentleman. *In guardia. . . . Avanti.*"

Hardly had the signal been given when Nicotera made a furious lunge. Lovito raised his saber to parry it, but in so doing he exposed his right forearm, and Nicotera wounded it with a quick thrust. The seconds instantly called a halt, and Nicotera lowered his sword. Lovito—either because he did not hear, could not interrupt his action, or simply was too angry to care—rushed at Nicotera, attempting *un colpo a bandoliera* (a bandolier stroke), a diagonal cut aimed at the shoulder. Nicotera raised his sword to shield himself and was badly cut on his wrist, the blade continuing down and cutting his head. At the same time Lovito had grabbed the blade of Nicotera's saber with his left hand and torn his palm wide open, severing his palmar artery.

There immediately followed a melee as the seconds struggled to separate them. One of Nicotera's seconds was lightly wounded on his leg with the tip of Lovito's sword, and the others suffered some blows from the flats of the blades.

Lovito fell to the ground, writhing in agony, but Nicotera seemed to be so animated by outrage that he hardly noticed his wounds. "Coward, assassin!" he exclaimed.

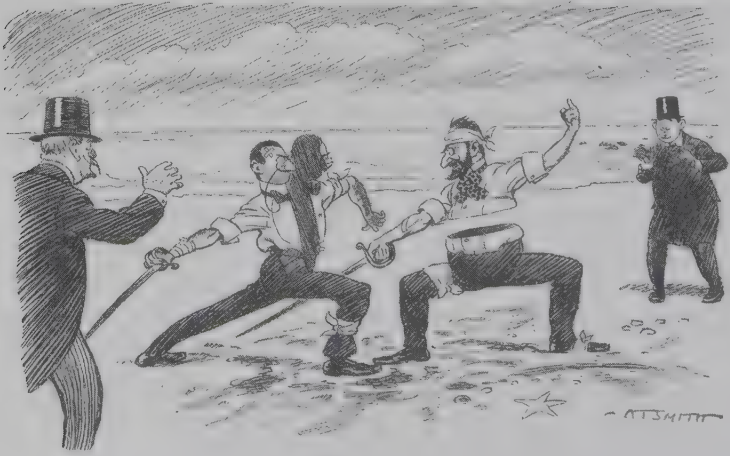
"Treason!" shouted Lovito in reply.

Angry words were exchanged between the seconds, and one of Lovito's "put himself at the disposal" of Nicotera's.

The principals left the ground. Both had had tendons and arteries severed, the wound in Lovito's palm being the most severe.

Negotiations over the official minutes consumed considerable time, and it was not signed by the seconds until four o'clock that afternoon. Though editorialists generally deplored the "slaughter duel," *Corriere della Sera* felt that Lovito's seconds had acted in poor faith by signing an account that was so damaging to their man.

Lovito tendered his resignation immediately after the duel, though he was not politically or morally obligated to do so, in order that he might be fully free to defend himself both in court and the arena of public opinion. *Corriere della Sera* expressed concern that a man subjected to an intolerable affront should feel he had to leave a position of power to restore his honor. It set a dangerous precedent, by allowing a political opponent to achieve with an insult that which he was unable to achieve through an election.[1]



A saber duel as depicted in Punch *(July 10, 1912).*

Nicotera returned to the post of minister of the interior when Francesco Crispi took power in 1887. While Lovito seemed to fade from the pages of history, Nicotera rated a lengthy obituary in the *New York Times* upon his death in 1894.[2]

NOTES

1. "The Roman Duel," *New York Herald*, December 9, 1883, p. 5, col. 1.
2. Sources: "Baron Giovanni Nicotera," *New York Times*, June 14, 1894, p. 5, col. 5; "I Particolari del Duello," *Corriere della Sera*, December 8, 1883, p.1, col. 5; "Italian Fire-Eaters," *New York Herald*, December 7, 1883, p. 5, col. 3; "Un duello macello," *Corriere della Sera*, December 9–10, 1883, p. 1, col. 5; "Dopo il duello," *Corriere della Sera*, December 10, 1883, p. 1, col. 3; "Lo Scontro tra Nicotera e Lovito," *La Tribuna*, December 8–9, 1883, p. 1, col. 3; "Sul duello," *La Tribuna*, December 9–10, 1883, p. 1, col. 2.

20 AURÉLIEN SCHOLL VS. COMTE ALBERT DE DION

JANUARY 9, 1884

Born in 1833, Aurélien Scholl was one of France's leading playwrights, critics, and journalists of the latter half of the 19th century. He was also a celebrated Parisian man-about-town, described as "the king of the boulevardiers."[1] Every evening, wearing his monocle and purple cravat, he sat at his reserved table at Tortoni's cafe, "enthroned like a patriarch in irreproachable correctness,"[2] and arbitrated issues of style and honor. Scholl fought a number of duels, in most of which he was wounded.

The tall and athletic Comte (later Marquis) Albert de Dion, 23 years Scholl's junior, was described as "a prominent ornament of the gayest coterie of Parisian society." He fought numerous duels and was never bested.

Trouble between the two men began when Scholl published an article about a scandal among the nobility. According to the *New York Herald*, "no names were mentioned, but certain innuendoes had been permitted," and Dion took offense. Going to the restaurant where Scholl regularly took breakfast, Dion confronted him. When Scholl confessed that he did not know with whom he was speaking, the count punched him twice in the face, exclaiming, “I am the Comte de Dion.”

> M. Scholl was covered with blood, but more blows followed and at length he attempted to defend himself with a short sword fixed in the stick of his umbrella. Blinded, however, by the blood, he only hit one of his friends. The bystanders interfered and he was led back to his seat, where his face was bathed with water. This done M. Scholl rose and approaching M. de Dion said, “This is a curious mode of picking a quarrel with me. Everyone knows I am always to be found when I am wanted.” He then returned to his place and was indulging in some rather uncomplimentary epithets, when he received a bottle full in the chest. The police were sent for and M. Scholl was taken home, being, it is stated, incapacitated for work for about a month.[3]

Dion served two months in prison for assault. After his release, a duel was arranged for January 9, 1884, with General Prince de Bauffremont and Commandant Franchet d’Esperet serving as seconds to Dion, and Robert Mitchell and Adolphe Tavernier serving in that capacity for Scholl.

With the growing popularity of fencing as a spectator sport, newspaper readers enjoyed technically accurate blow-by-blow accounts. The following was published in the *New York Herald*:

> The following is the narrative of the details of the duel as related to your correspondent by one of the four seconds who officiated on the occasion:
>
> The duel took place at noon near the grandstand of the racecourse of Longchamps. We wanted it to take place in the *pesage* [paddock], but when we arrived with our principals the keepers said that the

proprietors of the race course would not allow any duelling to take place on their property. So we were obliged to go further. We halted finally in one of the retired and picturesque promenades of the Bois.

M. Tavernier tossed up a louis for the choice of position.

Prince Bauffremont cried, "Heads!" and won.

M. Tavernier then tossed up again a louis for the choice of weapons.

Prince Bauffremont cried, "Heads!" and again won.

The Count de Dion then selected his position and chose his own weapons, a magnificent pair of swords with costly steel guards ornamented with his initials and the coronet of the count embossed in solid gold. M. Tavernier, to whom we delegated the direction of the combat, put the adversaries in position and engaged their swords.

At the command, "*Allez, Messieurs*!" the two combatants took ground *en rompant*.[4] Then M. Scholl attacked furiously with right points and thrusts. The Count de Dion all the while smiled most ironically and parried M. Scholl's attack, with highly finished but rather fantastic play, frequently tantalizing his adversary by raising his sword quite out of position of guard, for an instant completely exposing himself. M. Scholl made play at the chest, the Count de Dion at the stomach. At the expiration of four minutes M. Tavernier, believing that the Count de Dion was wounded in the wrist, stopped the combat, but it was merely the Count de Dion's shirt sleeve that had been torn.

At the second engagement the adversaries ceased to *rompre*,[5] and the play was more earnest. M. Scholl continued to attack vigorously and nearly succeeded in wounding the Count de Dion, but the latter very

> adroitly sprang back, missing the point by a hair's breadth. The combat continued in the most spirited manner imaginable. M. Scholl kept advancing and making play at the Count de Dion's chest, followed by a well-executed *dégagement dans la ligne basse*.[6] The Count de Dion always responded by the *riposte en seconde* after each passade.
>
> Finally, by a beautiful *riposte du tac au tac*[7] the Count de Dion wounded M. Scholl in the side, his sword entering between the eighth and ninth ribs. The sword, bending, broke at twenty centimeters from its point, the broken piece remaining in the wound. M. Scholl stepped back, saying, "*Je laisse.*" We seconds all approached, anxious to see if the wound was dangerous. M. Scholl smiled and said, "I have had worse wounds than this," referring to a severe wound in the chest received from M. Paul de Cassagnac.[8] "That's what comes of being so near-sighted," continued M. Scholl.
>
> Your correspondent here asked, "What was the real feeling of the adversaries before and after the combat?"
>
> The second answered: "They both did their best to kill each other."
>
> "Was there a reconciliation?"
>
> "No; but before the combat we seconds insisted that our respective principals should formally agree that this duel would finally settle the quarrel."
>
> "Is M. Scholl's wound serious?"
>
> "No; he went at five o'clock to Tortoni's as usual, and then went to his editorial chair in the *Evénement*."[9]

In addition to his journalism, Scholl wrote the prefaces to three books on dueling. He died in 1902.

Despite his almost incessant dueling, it is not primarily as a swashbuckler that Dion is remembered, but as the father of the automobile industry in France. He cofounded the Dion-Bouton motorcar company in 1882, which also built airplane engines and bicycles. Two of its cars were among the four vehicles to successfully complete the westward round-the-world race from New York to Paris in 1907, depicted in the *The Great Race* (1965). Albert de Dion founded the Automobile Club of France, the Flying Club of France, and started the Tour de France bicycle race. In 1902 he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies as the representative from Nantes. He died at age 90 in 1946.

NOTES

1. Francisque Sarcey, "The Boulevards of Paris," *Scribner's Magazine* 9 (June 1891): 667.
2. Dewey Stoddard, "The End of Tortoni's," *Atlantic Monthly* 73 (June 1894): 762.
3. "A Parisian Duel," *New York Herald*, January 10, 1884, p. 5, col. 5.
4. *En rompant*: immediately retreating at the outset of the duel.
5. *Rompre*: to break off an engagement by backing up.
6. A fencer disengages when he drops the line of his sword under or raises it over that of his adversary to open up a new line of attack. A *dégagement dans la ligne basse* is a disengagement along the low line, i.e., below the opponent's sword hand.
7. When a riposte is parried and responded to with another riposte, the second riposte is called the *tac-au-tac*.
8. Cassagnac was a newspaper editor and notorious duelist.
9. "A Spirited Duel," *New York Herald*, January 11, 1884, p. 5, col. 1.

21

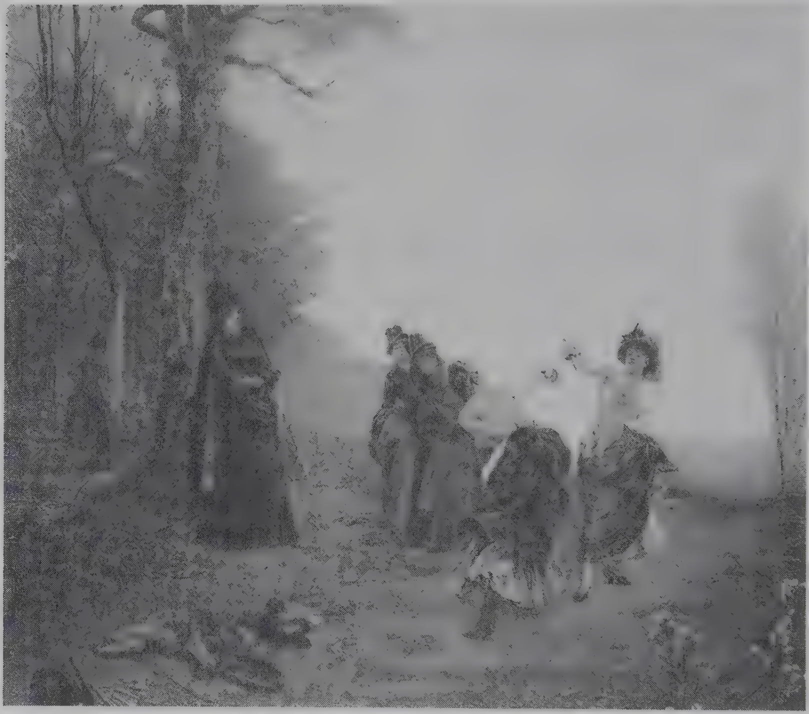
SEÑORITA MARTA DURAN VS. SEÑORITA JUANA LUNA

APRIL 1900

Duels between women were rare and highly irregular, but when they occurred they aroused a great deal of male interest. There is evidently a timeless appeal in the spectacle of women, usually in some degree of undress, violating intimate parts of each other's anatomy, too hot-blooded to concern themselves with modesty or propriety.

The following account was reprinted in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1900:

> The *Herald* published the following special telegram from the city of Mexico, which forms a remarkable realisation of the famous painting of the female duellists:
>
> "The details of a duel, in which the principals and seconds were women prominent in Mexican society, have just come to light. One woman was so seriously wounded that a surgeon had to be called in. This led to the arrest of the participants.
>
> "The duel grew out of a love affair. Rafael



"An Affair of Honor" by Emile Bayard.

Riquelme went to a fashionable ball several nights ago, accompanied by Señorita Marta Duran, the belle of the city. Señorita Juana Luna, to whom Riquelme had been paying marked attention, also attended the ball. She saw Señorita Duran in company with Rafael. Her hot Mexican blood surged up, and in a passion she confronted Señorita Duran, and, after a quarrel, challenged her rival.

"The challenge was accepted, and next morning the two women, with four seconds, drove in carriages to a vacant piece of ground near Romita, in the outskirts of the city. The rivals stripped to their waists, and the signal for the encounter was given.

"The first round was bloodless. In the second round Señorita Duran was the aggressor, while her opponent acted on the defensive. Señorita Duran's terrific thrusts began to tell upon her strength, and then Señorita Luna, who had been waiting for her adversary to tire herself, took advantage of her weariness and made a savage lunge at her breast. She inflicted an ugly wound, but Señorita Duran again faced her, and received a scratch on the cheek.

"In the third round Señorita Duran was weak from loss of blood, and Señorita Luna inflicted a wound on her sword arm. She dropped her weapon, and the duel was over.

"The women kissed, and the vanquished one, in true chivalrous fashion, renounced Señor Riquelme. The seconds placed the wounded woman in a carriage and drove her home. Her condition became so serious that a physician was summoned. Under Mexican law no doctor is permitted to treat a wounded person without an order from the authorities. The case was presented to the police inspector, and an investigation brought out the facts. Señorita Duran was taken to the Juarez Hospital, and the other five persons were arrested and placed in solitary confinement at Belem."[1]

NOTE

1. "A Women's Duel in Mexico," *Daily Telegraph*, April 4, 1900, p. 6, col. 6.

22

THE ROTHSCHILD-LUBERSAC AFFAIR

1900–1901

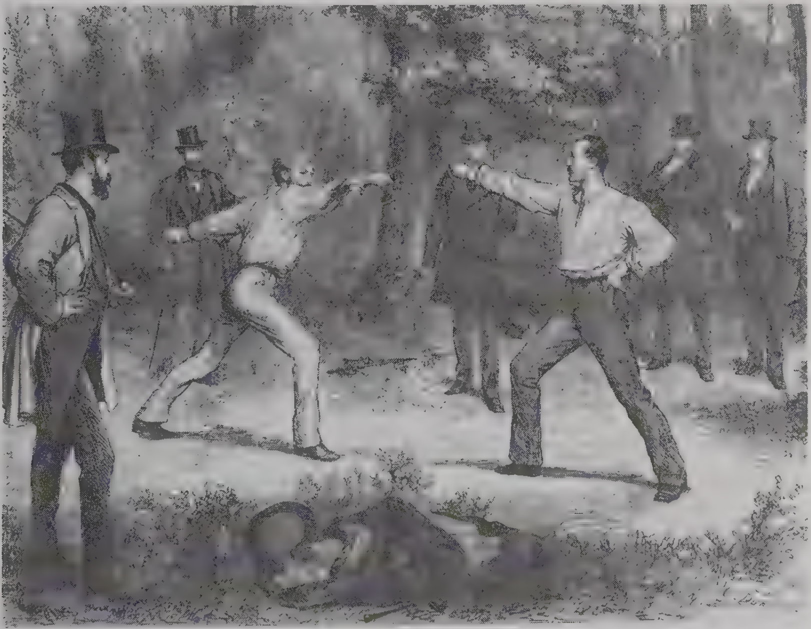
In the 19th century, the Rothschilds were the richest and most powerful banking family in Europe, as well as its most prominent Jews, a coincidence that aroused considerable resentment.

French anti–Semitism hit a peak at the end of the 1890s during the Dreyfus affair, when a Jewish officer was accused of selling military secrets to the Germans. Through a series of retrials in which Dreyfus was eventually vindicated, the case bitterly divided France from 1894 until 1906. Stigmatized as traitors and cowards, many Jews picked up the sword to maintain their honor, and there were more than 30 duels fought between Jews and their detractors in France in a dozen years.[1]

It was in this fevered atmosphere that Comte Guy de Lubersac, 23, challenged a former classmate, Robert de Rothschild, 20, to a duel over a petty argument they had had a few years earlier, while schoolboys. Rothschild and a friend had been using the school tennis court when Lubersac arrived and demanded that they yield it to him, although their game was not over. An argument ensued in which Lubersac called Rothschild "a dirty Jew."

Lubersac set out to revive their quarrel on March 25, 1900, in the following letter, which was also published in the newspapers:

> Monsieur,
>
> Do you remember that, a few years ago, I expressed to you one or two truths which seemed to offend you? You came to me, on the following day, to demand that I apologize. My response was no. I repeated it. At that time we were not yet adults, and so there the affair rested. But by now haven't you reached the age where one is personally responsible for his acts? I would be grateful if you would let me



A duel in the Bois de Boulogne.

> know: to inform myself about this point I have searched in vain for your baptismal certificate in all the parishes of Paris. I think you know the disgust that you and yours inspire in me. Despite that, I will do you the honor of putting myself at your disposal.
>
> If you consider yourself too unworthy to stand up against me on the field, I would be obliged if you would contribute the sum of one hundred thousand francs with the *Ligue de la Patrie française*.[2]
>
> You will have, I am sure, the approval of your co-religionist, Mr. Ephrussi.
>
> I believe, on my part, Sir, that I have given you all the respect which you deserve.
>
> Comte de Lubersac.[3]

Upon receipt of this letter Robert de Rothschild, still a student at the Ecole des Mines, sent his seconds, E. de Saint-Alary and A. de Neuflize, to meet with the seconds of Lubersac, Comte Albert de Dion and Comte Boni de Castellane. When the latter men learned that Robert was still a minor, they ruled out the possibility of a duel, despite the fact that his father, Baron Gustave de Rothschild, had given him permission to fight. Dion recommended arbitration, but Saint-Alary rejected that course.

Bitterly disappointed, Robert wrote Lubersac an angry letter that concluded with "when one finds a man old enough to give him insult, one ought not to find him too young to give him satisfaction."[4]

Frustrated in his attempt to duel his chosen adversary, Lubersac broadened his challenge to the entire family. On April 1 he wrote an open letter to Robert's older cousin Edouard, the only son of Alphonse de Rothschild, the family patriarch, which concluded with "I address my contempt to you, and I warn you that wherever I may meet you I shall fling my glove in your face." However, Michel Ephrussi, 55, husband of Alphonse's daughter Charlotte, demanded the first duel with

Lubersac on the basis of the insult to him in the initial letter. They fought on April 4.

The first four-minute-long engagements were without result, but "at the commencement of the fifth it was seen that the temper of both combatants was rising, and they attacked each other with a violence, which caused a certain amount of anxiety among the spectators."[5] There occurred a double hit when Ephrussi made a beat[6] in low quarte that struck Lubersac's neck on the left, narrowly missing the carotid artery; at the same time Lubersac, bringing his sword back into line, pierced Ephrussi in the right side of his chest, a little below the nipple, his point penetrating five centimeters before being stopped by a rib, which bent its tip. At the time this wound appeared more serious than it was, and it was later noted that the fact that neither wound proved fatal was a matter of mere centimeters. On the advice of the doctors, the duel was ended.

The second duel in the series arose between two of the opposing seconds, Dion and Saint-Alary, because after the negotiations for the original duel failed, Dion had suggested that Saint-Alary seemed unaware of some of the finer points of honor. Dion had fought 13 times previously without ever having been touched, but on this day he was handicapped with a sprained wrist. Saint-Alary, a sports correspondent, had also dueled before and was known as an excellent fencer. According to the *New York Herald*:

> At noon the combat, which, with bouts of two minutes each and rests of about three minutes, had lasted an hour and a quarter, had still come to no conclusion. The adversaries came up for the fifteenth bout. Almost immediately, on a change of position by M. de Saint-Alary, Comte de Dion lunged straight in the line of his shoulder.[7] His sword penetrated about two inches into the upper part of his adversary's arm.

> M. de Saint-Alary said: "*Je suis touché.*"

The duel was ended upon the insistence of the doctors and seconds and over the objections of Saint-Alary. The combatants shook hands. The article concluded:

> Will this encounter put an end to the regrettable incidents of which it has been one of the consequences? It is to be hoped so, but this is by no means certain, the questions raised between Comte de Lubersac and M. de Rothschild still being in suspense.[8]

Edouard Rothschild fought with Lubersac on April 12, 1900. The *New York Herald* reported:

> A duel between Baron Edouard de Rothschild and Comte de Lubersac took place yesterday at eleven o'clock, inside private grounds at Neuilly.
>
> M. de Rothschild was slightly wounded in the forearm in the first bout.
>
> Complete secrecy was maintained regarding the duel, which was witnessed only by the four seconds and two doctors—Professors Berger and Poirier.
>
> Swords had hardly been crossed seventy-two seconds when the Baron received the wound which put an end to the combat. He wished to go on, but the doctors absolutely refused to allow him to do so.[9]

A French account mentions that Edouard de Rothschild was struck with a *coup d'arrêt*,[10] and the wound, though minor, caused his arm to go numb within minutes. He was nevertheless able to go out for a stroll in the afternoon and received a number of visitors.[11]

At the beginning of the following year Baron Robert de

Rothschild was in service with 54th Infantry Regiment, in garrison at Compiegne. On January 21, 1901, the day after he turned 21, he settled his account with Lubersac. Having obtained a five-day pass, he traveled to the estate of Baron Edmonde de Rothschild, where the duel was arranged for 10:30 A.M. No family members were notified, and no spectators were present.

Le Figaro published an account based on an interview with one of the seconds:

> At 10:30 precisely the combat began. Chance favored M. de Lubersac for the choice of position and the choice of épées.
>
> M. Robert de Rothschild had the sun in his eyes.
>
> M. Sohège, primary second of M. de Lubersac, directed the combat.
>
> The two adversaries wore unstarched cotton shirts and street gloves. M. Robert de Rothschild—who is completing his year's service with the 54th of line—fought in his soldier's red trousers. From the beginning, he showed remarkable sangfroid. Not as large as his adversary, he did not let him gain ground on him, and executed quick rapid counter-parries in sixte, always keeping his point very much in line: this way his arm and the chest were covered. M. de Lubersac was well placed on guard position, and his point, always threatening, vigorously held its place against the attempts of his adversary to move it out of line.
>
> On both sides, equal courage and equal coolness. The two adversaries, who are fencers, have both had marvelous training. The best proof of this training is in the fact that the duel lasted a little over an hour.
>
> There were sixteen engagements of two minutes each.
>
> In the third, M. de Lubersac had his glove pierced

> by his adversary's point, and in the fifteenth or sixteenth bout a thrust hit him in his shoulder, causing only a light scratch.
>
> Bout followed bout, without serious result. All the attacks were parried and no ripostes landed.
>
> Finally, in the sixteenth engagement, M. de Lubersac, after an attack, withdrew his arm slightly, but that was enough to allow M. de Rothschild to place his point by making a half-lunge.
>
> M. Sohège, who directed the entire combat with impeccable impartiality, shouted: "Halt!"
>
> M. le Comte de Lubersac was taken by surprise to have received a wound over twenty centimeters long.[12]

According to the *New York Times*, the point of Rothschild's sword penetrated Lubersac's arm just above the elbow and exited at the armpit.[13] On the recommendation of the doctors and seconds, the combat ended.

The wound was not serious, and Lubersac was back to his fencing practice within days. He died in 1932 at age 54. A fulsome obituary published in the *Times* (London) noted that "'Prompt to Combat' was the device of his family, which dates back to the ninth century, and this was his attitude in life. He fought 19 duels in the space of a very few years, and there are certain people in Paris who to this day remain dishonoured for not having dared to settle their differences with him."[14]

Robert de Rothschild was not among them. He and his cousin Edouard took over the Paris branch of the banking empire, and he continued to play a leading role in social, cultural, and philanthropic affairs. He also owned the most famous vineyard in winemaking, Château Lafite-Rothschild, and was, of all things, the French national bobsledding champion in 1936. In June 1940 he fled to England aboard an overcrowded freighter as the German army overran France. He resettled in New York and died in 1946.

NOTES

1. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor*, 210.
2. The French National League was a nationalist, anti–Semitic organization.
3. "Un Incident Parisien," *Le Figaro*, March 31, 1900, p.1, col. 5.
4. Ibid., p.1, col. 5.
5. "MM. Ephrussi and De Lubersac Fight," *New York Herald*, April 5, 1900, p. 9, col. 5.
6. Beat: a sharp, striking movement on an opponent's blade with one's own in an attempt to knock it aside as a preparation for an attack.
7. According to a French account, "The fifteenth bout was the most lively: the Count de Dion and M. de Saint-Alary attacked by turns, and during the most interesting piece of swordplay, the Count de Dion parried in sixte, riposted above and thrust M. de Saint-Alary in the right arm, on the upper side of the elbow." See Maurice Leudet, "Le Duel D'Hier," *Le Figaro*, April 8, 1900, p. 1, col. 5.
8. "Duel that Lasted an Hour and Quarter: Detailed Report of Encounter Between MM. de Dion and Saint-Alary," *New York Herald*, April 9, 1900, p. 11, col. 2.
9. "Comte de Lubersac Again Fights Duel," *New York Herald*, April 13, 1900, p. 9, col. 3.
10. *Coup d'arrêt*: a stop-hit; a counteroffensive strike delivered in the same time as an opponent's attack, along with a movement of the body to evade that attack.
11. "Le Duel Rothschild-Lubersac," *Le Figaro*, January 21, 1901, p. 1, col. 5.
12. Ibid.
13. "A Rothschild in a Duel," *New York Times*, January 21, 1901, p. 7, col. 5.
14. "The Marquis de Lubersac," *Times* (London), April 18, 1932, p. 17, col. 2.

23

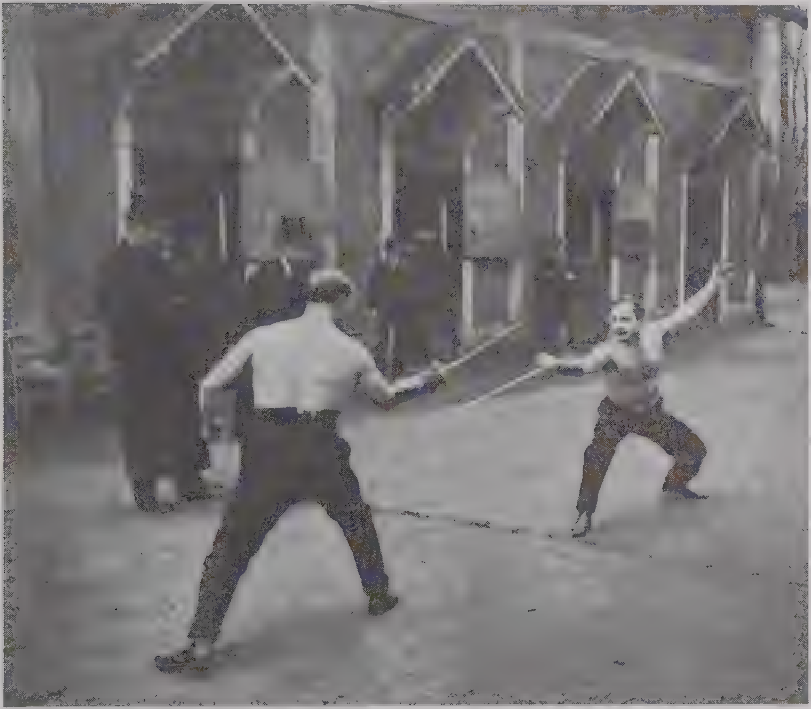
EUGENIO PINI VS. BARON ATHOS DI SAN MALATO

MARCH 13, 1904

The last quarter of 19th century saw an enormous upsurge in popular interest in fencing worldwide—for the next 50 years professional fencing matches would draw crowds of thousands. Duels between fencing masters were fought at the drop of a hat because the risks were small and the publicity gratifying. Eugenio Pini and Baron Athos San Malato were among the top exponents of the Italian style, and both had dueled with others before,[1] so it was no surprise when they met to duel on March 13, 1904, before a large contingent of the press.

Eugenio Pini was the fencing master at the Royal Naval Academy in Leghorn (Livorno) and an international professional foil champion in the 1890s. In 1894, a critic described him as "a phenomenon among fencers" and "the best of the Italian *toucheurs*,"[2] a term he used for those who fenced offensively rather than defensively. As for his style, "he is all fire and fury, stamps, cries out, holds his foil this way and that, strikes the floor with it, whirls about, and tries in every way to confuse and intimidate his adversary."[3]

Baron Athos San Malato was the son of Baron Turillo di



The Pini-Malato duel.

San Malato, the Italian master who made a splash upon his arrival in Paris in 1881. Athos followed in his father's footsteps and achieved fame in his own right.

The duel was covered in the *New York Tribune*, which opened its article by observing, "Spectacular sensational duels, in the presence of large and fashionable assemblies and with well-organized buffets and lunch tables seem to be coming into vogue as the favorite pastime of the smart set of Parisians. The Chéri-Halbronn racing stables at Neuilly have become a sort of twentieth century Pré-aux-Clercs."[4] In society-page fashion, it named a dozen of the celebrities present before introducing the principals:

The Chevalier Pini is the recognized head of the school of fencing which has adopted the system of the fleuret, or long, narrow foils. Baron San Malato is the head of the school of the épée, or extremely rigid sword, hollow ground, in the fashion of weapons of the Louis XIII period. The hostile meeting had been preceded by two weeks of voluminous correspondence, homeric invective and challenges, and it was only after great difficulty and patience that these two princes of the sword were brought together. Pini came from Tunis, while San Malato was in Paris. The encounter is regarded by fencing experts as the most memorable feat of arms recorded in their art for fifty years.

At 11 o'clock on Sunday morning the friends of the two antagonists assembled on the beautiful, close-cropped lawn in front of the Chéri stables. Dr. Doyen, the surgeon, came up in an automobile, and an attendant followed with a large case of surgical instruments and phials, powders, lint and courtplaster enough for the Russo-Japanese War. Then arrived the Baron San Malato in an electric automobile, attended by his two seconds, MM. Georges Breittmayer[5] and Georges Bureau. A few moments later another automobile glided up to the entrance gate, and out of it stepped the Chevalier Pini, accompanied by his seconds, MM. Tavernier and De Alvear. Pini walked up to the gate and rang the bell. The concierge, or gatekeeper, appeared, and, as Pini had no card of invitation, entrance was refused him. Pini exclaimed in French with a strong Italian accent: "But I am Pini! You must let me in!" The error was soon repaired, and the antagonists were conducted to their respective rooms and proceeded to strip to the waist for the encounter.[6] Dr. Doyen meanwhile prepared the swords by dipping them into long-necked bottles of disinfectants.

The four seconds measured the distances. Each combatant was allowed fifteen meters space, beyond which neither could retreat without being disqualified. The ground gained during the combat was to be retained; that is to say, the combatants were to begin each round at the places where they stood at the termination of the preceding bout. Each round was to last two minutes, and two minutes' rest between the first three rounds, and five intervals of repose for subsequent rounds. At 12:05 o'clock the two adversaries stepped briskly onto the duelling lawn. They wore black trousers and fencing-room shoes of white canvas. They had fencing gloves, and strips of leather were wound around the forearm from the wrist to the elbow. They were naked to the waist. They wore Russian caps, to protect their eyes from the sun. San Malato was in excellent condition, muscular, wiry and alert. Pini was the stouter man of the two, but his muscles were enormous, and he looked like a gladiator. Pini is fifty-two years old. San Malato is thirty-four. Both are of the same height—five feet seven inches. M. Adolphe Tavernier, Editor of "Le Figaro," and author of several treatises on fencing, "directed the combat," and, advancing between the two combatants, pronounced the usual word of command, *"Allez, Messieurs."* Both adversaries used basket-hilted swords. The two men glared at each other like tigers. Pini was determined, fierce and more cool-headed than his rival. San Malato danced about like a wild Indian, and shouted and yelled like a madman. It was apparent from the outset that they were evenly matched. San Malato began the attack with his long, straight sword extended at full arm's length, and his thrusts were, as a rule, very high. Pini crouched with his body as near to the ground as possible, and kept his guard very low, seeking to get his blade home beneath San Malato's long-reaching sword. San Malato sought to fatigue his opponent, and made his attacks with the rapidity of lightning. The swords flashed incessantly, and the peculiar ring of steel resounded all over the place. It was a wonderful exhibition of science. San Malato showed his temper and roared like a lion, and with each thrust shouted: "*Eh là oh!*"[7] Pini retorted with hissing between his clenched teeth: "*Eh là! Eh là!*" Pini's thrusts were so low that several times when San Malato parried them the points of the swords were buried in the turf. This made halts necessary, and a redistribution of disinfectants on the soiled blades.

At the sixth round it was thought that Pini had been wounded on the arm, and again at the ninth, but these were mere scratches that scarcely drew blood. Thirteen rounds continued without either opponent being really touched. In the fourteenth Pini received a scratch on the upper part of the nose. A few drops of blood trickled down. A piece of sticking plaster was adjusted, and the battle continued. Pini had meanwhile been forced by San Malato to the extreme limit of his space of fifteen paces. Suddenly with the spring of a panther Pini bounded sideways, and in three gigantic leaps accomplished a volte[8] with such precision that he stood exactly in the former position of his adversary. Both had turned completely around. At this moment Pini's sword scratched the breast of San Malato, and, in parrying, the point of San Malato's sword touched Pini between the eyes. Neither party was wounded, but an enthusiastic spectator, Chevalier Scalisi, tried to intervene and shouted: "You are both of you brave as lions! Stop fighting and embrace each other!"

"Not a bit of it," exclaimed Pini, "I am going to fight it out to the death!"

The duel went on for an hour longer, thus making two and a half hours altogether. Seconds and spectators urged the advisability of a cessation of hostilities. At the eighteenth round San Malato complained that a blister had formed on the palm of his right hand, caused by the long and strenuous exertion of the contest. The surgeon examined the blister and declared that it placed San Malato at an obvious disadvantage in regard to his opponent.

An impetuous journalist ran to the telephone to inform his newspaper that "the combat had come to an end owing to exhaustion of both adversaries."

Pini, overhearing the message, burst into violent rage and exclaimed: "No, sir! Don't speak for me. Pini is never exhausted!"

Both the irascible fencing masters wished to continue the duel another day as soon as San Malato's blister could be cured. Common friends interposed. San Malato advanced toward Pini and remarked: "I might have written that you were afraid of my sword before this combat, but I can certainly not say so after it!"

Pini laughed good-naturedly and the ferocious antagonists shook hands. They both joyfully accepted Dr. Doyen's invitation to lunch together. Friends and spectators crowded around them to offer congratulations for their marvelous prowess. Oceans of champagne were drunk, and so: *"Finita la commédia!"* or, *"Finita la tragedia!"* as those who were present at this memorable duel may prefer to qualify it.[9]

NOTES

1. Pini fought Albert Thomegeux on March 17, 1897, and succeeded in cutting his lip. San Malato faced off with Professor Damotte on January 28, 1901, and wounded him in the armpit. Both men are known to have fought other duels as well. On December 5, 1907, when he was serving as fencing master at Argentina's military academy, Pini dueled with a fellow maestro, Revello, and wounded him in the arm. See Raúl Oller, *Los Duelos* (Buenos Aires: La Historia Popular, 1972): 95–97.
2. Charles de Kay, "French and Italian Swordsmen," *Harper's Weekly* 38 (March 24, 1894): 285.
3. Ibid., 286.
4. Pré-aux-Clercs: A traditional dueling ground outside the walls of Paris.
5. Georges Breittmayer was a prominent French fencer and duelist who wrote the last version of the French dueling code, *Code de l'honneur et du duel: Après guerre août 1914* (1918).
6. Fighting bare-chested had become customary so that seconds could more quickly spot injuries.
7. The cry *eh là* was used to control one's attention, timing, and breath, like the *kiai* of the Eastern martial artist.
8. Volte: an action that carries the body to the right or left by pivoting 180 degrees on the right foot.
9. "Princes of the Sword Fight a Memorable Duel," *New York Tribune*, Sunday, March 20, 1904, sect. 2, p. 1, col. 5.

Part 2

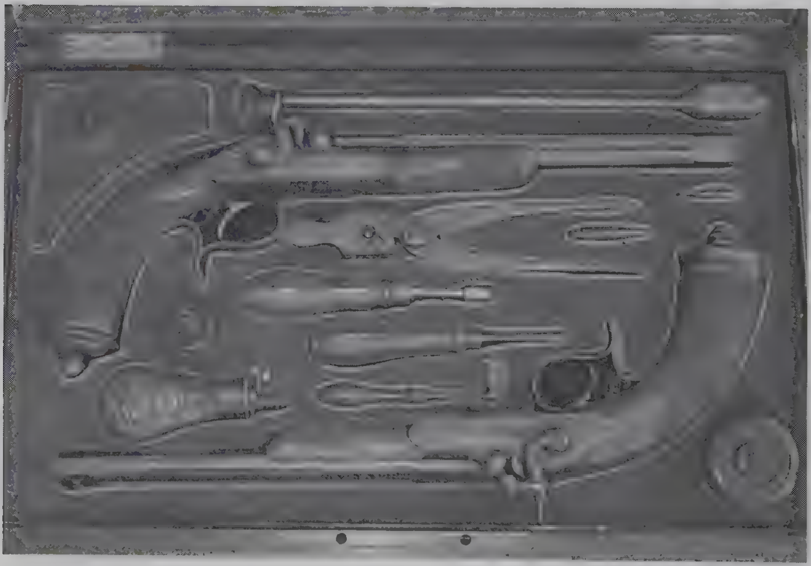
DUELING WITH THE PISTOL

The first pistols specifically designed for dueling appeared around 1770 and evolved from the paired holster pistols slung over their saddles by cavalrymen. Crafted to the finest standards, they were slim, graceful, and well balanced. They had curved walnut stocks, often finely checkered to facilitate the grip. Their actions were hand fitted and honed to an oily slickness. Their barrels were about 10 inches in length, precisely bored and polished, usually taking a ball of .50 to .60 caliber.[1]

A matched pair of dueling pistols was sold in a baize-lined case of oak or mahogany, with compartments containing everything necessary for loading and maintenance. Standard accessories were a powder flask and measure, a ramrod, a screwdriver, and a mold for casting spherical lead bullets precisely matched to the bore. Additional items might include a small mallet for use with the ramrod, an oil bottle, linen patches and a patch cutter, a cleaning rod, a corkscrew-like "worm" for extracting bullets from the barrel, a pricker for cleaning the touchhole, a flashpan brush, a cutter for trimming the mold marks from the bullet after casting, a powder and ball scale, and extra flints or percussion caps.

Dueling pistols were manufactured in various European countries, with those from the British Isles the most highly prized. While Continental pistols were often heavily engraved and embellished, the beauty of the English-style pistol lay not in decoration, but in its clean, serious appearance and fine workmanship. Among the best-known London gunmakers were Griffin & Tow, Twigg, Nock, Egg, Mortimer, Wogdon, Manton, Baker, and Purdey. Rigby was the foremost of a dozen firms in Dublin, as was Innes in Edinburgh. In 1800, a brace of fine pistols sold for £30 and up, more than $2,200 in today's currency. Many gentlemen did not own a set but borrowed them as needed.

The classic dueling pistol was a single-shot muzzleloader. To load it, a carefully measured charge of powder was poured down the barrel; then a well-fitted round lead bullet, often



A cased set of Belgian export pistols with accessories. Marked "L. Ambrosini, Buenos Ayres," these .36-caliber rifled pistols, equipped with adjustable sights, might have been used for target shooting or dueling. Provided by Mike Fletcher.

wrapped in a patch of greased linen or chamois, was inserted into the muzzle and forced down with the ramrod, with the assistance of a mallet if necessary.

Early models used the flintlock action, which required that a separate powder charge be loaded into an exterior priming pan. A hinged lid held this charge in place and protected it from the elements. When the trigger was pulled, the hammer struck a wedge of flint against a plate of steel, showering sparks into the pan. The exploding priming charge sent a jet of flame through a tiny connecting passage—the touchhole—to detonate the main charge.

The flintlock had two serious shortcomings. First, the lock time (the time between the pulling of the trigger and the detonation of the charge) was relatively slow, which affected accuracy, because the aim might be jarred by the fall of the hammer. Second, flintlocks were prone to misfires, either through a failure to produce a spark or the proverbial "flash in the pan" that didn't detonate the charge. In British army tests in 1834, flintlock muskets misfired, on average, once every 13 times the trigger was pulled.[2]

In 1807 Rev. Alexander Forsyth developed an ignition system using fulminate of mercury. This led to the percussion cap, a small, disposable copper cup coated on the inside with the explosive chemical. Fitted tightly over a nipple connected to the touchhole, it would detonate the charge when struck by the gun's hammer. Percussion caps not only simplified loading but improved performance: in the 1834 test, they failed only once in 166 shots and cut lock time by more than 200 percent, allowing for greater accuracy. By sealing the end of the touchhole, the cap also imparted more velocity to the bullet, since none of the explosive force was vented.

By the 1820s nearly all new pistols used it, and many existing flintlocks were retrofitted.

Most fine dueling pistols had a "set" or "hair" trigger, a discretionary feature that could reduce the pressure necessary to release the trigger from about 10–12 pounds to about half a pound. Once the pistol was cocked, the hair trigger was activated by nudging it forward. The lighter trigger pull allowed for more accurate shooting, but it occasionally led to accidental discharges.

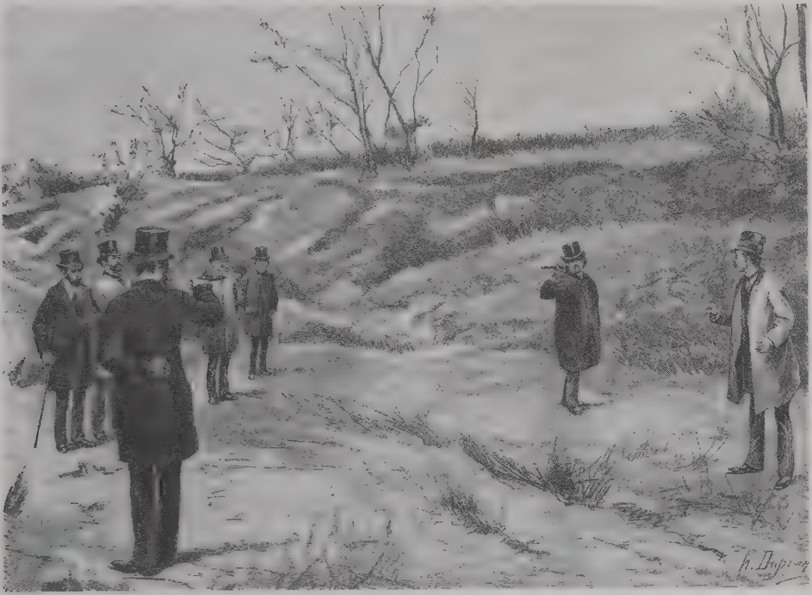
Early dueling pistols had no sights or sometimes merely a small bead at the front and a low, fixed, notched blade at the rear. Adjustable sights were generally considered a violation of the code.

Octagonal barrels were particularly fashionable. In the absence of proper sights, the straight, slatted sides may have provided a quick aiming reference.

A safety latch to lock the pistol in the half-cock mode also became a standard feature on quality pistols, though, interestingly, not on those made in Ireland. As John Atkinson wrote, "The Irish believe that pistols were for shooting with and anything which might interfere with this natural function was to be shunned."[3]

Gunsmiths regularly introduced technical innovations into their dueling pistols, such as roller bearings on the pan-cover hinge and gold-lined touchholes for corrosion resistance. In 1787 Henry Nock introduced the patent breech, which shortened the distance from the pan to the main charge, providing faster and more reliable ignition. In 1795, John Manton put a spur on the trigger guard around which the middle finger could be wrapped for a better grip. Around 1800 the "saw-handle" stock was popularized by H.W. Mortimer, an ergonomically superior design that closely resembled that of a modern target pistol.

In studying the dueling pistol, one is struck by the contradiction that while it incorporated many accuracy-enhancing innovations, it eschewed the most obvious: rifling. Those spiral grooves inside the barrel that impart a gyroscopic spin to a bullet were forbidden under most codes; it was felt that there should be an ample role for fate in the outcome of duels, and



that a rifled weapon was contrary to the spirit. Some gunsmiths got around this with "scratch" rifling, cut so lightly into the bore that it was nearly invisible at the muzzle. Equally devious was blind or "French" rifling, which ended about an inch from the muzzle and was undetectable without close scrutiny. Many pistols made by the Manton brothers had this feature.

Such tricks were probably not worth the effort. As one expert wrote in 1836, "Were duels fought at a distance of fifty or sixty yards there might be some advantage in using a rifled barrel, but at twelve yards there can be none."[4] In a test of a smoothbore pistol made by Purdey, a marksman was able to keep all his shots in two inches at fifteen yards, certainly accurate enough for its purpose.[5]

The dueling pistol was traditionally fired one-handed. It was supposed to point from the hand as naturally as the index finger, so that a swift, fluid firing stroke would bring it automatically on target when it was raised to eye level. This not only allowed a man to get his shot off quickly, but showed good form, since the taking of slow, deliberate aim was frowned upon.

Opinion varied as to whether it was appropriate for a gentleman to take target practice immediately before a duel. In Great Britain, by the early 19th century, such practice was considered evidence of homicidal intent and could be introduced in court. Generally, though, a gentleman liked to keep his skills honed should the need arise. Most of the famous London gunsmiths maintained firing ranges on their premises, the most famous being Manton's on Davies Street. In Paris, the pistol gallery of Gastinne-Renette offered small plaster busts of Napoleon to shoot at, as well as the cast-iron silhouette of a man in dueling posture. In the United States, where duels were undertaken with more deadly intent than was customary in Europe, a man would often undertake serious training beforehand. In the 1840s a professional trainer in Columbia, South Carolina, ran advertisements offering instruction "in the various branches of self defense" that was "calculated to give satisfaction."[6] In 1836, one Mr. Mittag "went to Camden and put himself under the training of the great duelist Chapman Levy, a man whose advice had always been sought in every duel that had been fought in the upper part of South Carolina for many years. Levy put Mittag though a course of training, and he became a pretty good shot."[7] Prior to an 1834 duel in Texas, William T. Austin "because of his inexperience in pistol shooting . . . went into training under the supervision of Colonel W.D.C. Hall,"[8] and afterward Austin wounded his opponent in the arm.

Impressive levels of marksmanship are often described in accounts of dueling. The 18th-century Irish fire-eaters boasted that "they could hit an opponent in any part of his body they pleased, and made up their minds before the encounter began whether they should kill him, disable, or disfigure him for life—lay him on a bed of suffering for a twelve-month, or merely graze a limb."[9] Some men were supposed to be able to break the stem of a wine glass, drill the ace out of a playing card, or snuff a candle at 20 paces. Capt. Horatio Ross, godson of Lord Nelson and a champion competitive shooter, was said to be able to hit a sparrow on the wing. Sometimes a reputation for expert marksmanship was sufficient to dissuade challengers, as when Sen. Benjamin Wade of Ohio insulted Sen. Robert Toombs of Georgia during the acrimonious debates before the Civil War. A South Carolinian representative told Toombs, "You must challenge the old wretch!"

"Oh no, I mustn't," replied Toombs, "for that same old wretch is the deadest shot in the district. Wade and I have been out practicing many times together, and he can hit a ten-cent piece at thirty paces every time, and, to tell you the truth, sir, *I cannot!*"[10]

Poor shooting was usually attributed to nervous tension. In the 1845 duel between Maj. John Smart and Col. James P. Dickinson, neither party was hit in two exchanges, though both men were reputed to be crack shots.

Major Smart, the challenger, was asked, "Are you satisfied?"

"Disgusted," he responded, to general laughter.

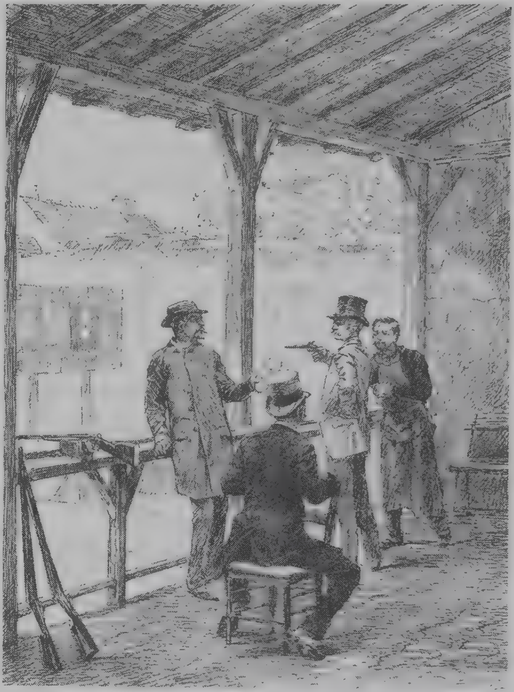
He later observed, "In practice I could hit a sapling the size of my wrist every fire, and Dickinson could too, but then the sapling was not armed."[11]

The distance at which a pistol duel was to be fought was one of the most important points to be negotiated beforehand. It was measured in paces of about a yard each. In the French code, 15 yards was the minimum distance for pistol duels, and they were often fought at 25 yards or more, which would be considered frivolous in the United States, Germany, or the British Isles. There, 10 or 12 paces were typical, and distances might be further shortened to equalize a marked discrepancy in eyesight or shooting skill. As Richard Burton put it, "The difference of a very few feet levels all distinction. At 24 paces everything is in favor of the practised shot; at 12 a large proportion; at 6 nothing."[12]

Stephen Decatur took this into account when he acted as second to Joseph Bainbridge at Malta in 1803. Bainbridge was a poor marksman, while the Englishman who had challenged him, a Mr. Cochran, was an expert. Decatur specified four paces.

"This looks like murder," Cochran's second protested, but finally agreed.

Cochran was killed at the second fire, while Bainbridge escaped unscathed.



A shooting gallery in Paris.

Another matter for negotiation was the manner in which the duel would be fought. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, it was common for principals to stand on their marks and fire alternately. The privilege of the first fire was usually granted to the challenger, whose opponent had to stand with appropriate sangfroid while awaiting his shot. One 1790 manual on dueling emphatically declared that "it is undoubtedly just and fair, in the opinion of every man, that the aggressor should be obliged to receive the first fire from the man whom, from affronting, he forced into the field."[13] However, a manual published a few years later decried as murderous a system in which "the Body of a Man is to stand as a Mark, for a cool Shot, without *any*

Interruption, like the *Ace of Diamonds*—the Lord of Heaven defend us!"[14]

Alternate fire was phased out in favor of the duel on command, in which opponents fired simultaneously upon a signal. This became the customary style in Great Britain, France, and the United States.

In duels resulting from a particularly serious affront, principals sometimes started the duel with two pistols in hand. A report of one such duel dates from April 1752:

> Towards the end of this month a duel was fought in the county of Gallway [*sic*], Ireland, between capt. Hamilton and cornet Nugent of St. George's dragons, in which each fired a pair of pistols, when the capt. received a shot in the hip, and another in the side of his head; the other received one shot along his ribs, and another in his arm, which 'twas feared must be cut off, and both were in a dangerous way.[15]

In Germany and Russia, the "barrier" duel was common. Principals were positioned a long distance apart—perhaps 40 paces—and advanced toward each other upon the signal. However, they could not step into a measured zone halfway between them that established the minimum distance at which they could exchange fire. This zone, or barrier, might be anywhere from 10 to 20 yards wide. Once a man fired, he had to stand his ground until his opponent returned fire, and in many cases his opponent was allowed to advance to his edge of the barrier before taking his shot. In this type of duel a man weighed a difficult trade-off: if he shot first, he had to do so at long range on a moving target, and if he missed, his opponent could close the distance between them and shoot deliberately.

The kind of duel most often depicted in popular culture—in which the principals stand back to back, walk off a prescribed number of paces, and then turn and fire—was relatively unusual.

There were also what were called "exceptional" duels, in which particularly dangerous conditions were set, such as calling for more than three exchanges of fire; using rifles, shotguns, or revolvers (not uncommon in the United States); or fighting at extremely short range. An example of the last was the *duel au mouchoir*, in which each combatant fired while grasping a corner of a handkerchief (mouchoir) with his left hand. In another type of exceptional duel, the seconds loaded only one pistol of a pair. Each principal held his pistol against his opponent's chest, not knowing whether he would kill or be killed when he pulled the trigger. The duel with one loaded pistol reduced the outcome to chance, not skill, and eliminated the possibility that both parties might be killed or maimed. However, it also eliminated the likelihood that neither would be hit, and for that reason it was considered barbarous. Alexandre Dumas portrays such a duel vividly in his short story "Zodomirsky's Duel."

When dressing for the duel, matte-black suits with cloth-covered buttons were preferred, and on the ground the combatant would often button his lapels to the throat. Gilt buttons and white shirt fronts were considered useful aiming points for an opponent.

Silk shirts or silk-lined jackets were sometimes worn because of the strength and purity of the material. It was understood that scraps of cloth that entered a wound did as much harm as the bullet itself, and silk was considered clean. Humphrey Howarth, a British member of Parliament who had served as a military surgeon, was so concerned about the risk of infection that upon arriving at the ground for an 1806 duel with Lord Barrymore, he stripped naked. Barrymore indignantly refused to sight upon him, and the affair dissolved on the spot.[16]

Acting as second for Harry De Courcey in a California duel, Edward Kemble took further precautions to which he ascribed his principal's subsequent recovery:

> When De Courcey asked me to act for him, I told him I would do so if he would place himself entirely in my hands and follow my directions. He agreed to this. I then sparred with the other parties for time. By dilatory expedients in correspondence, I delayed the meeting for three days, so as to get my man in condition. In the meantime I confined him strictly to his room and placed him on a toast and tea diet, and not much of that. Consequently when he reached the field his stomach was empty, and when his adversary's ball perforated his bowels the flaccid intestines offered no resistance to the bullet, which passed between them and out at the other side. No vital part was affected, and as soon as the exterior flesh wounds healed he would be as sound as ever.[17]

Upon arrival at the dueling ground, the first order of business for the seconds was to select a good spot and measure off the distance. Once it was marked off, they tossed a coin for the choice of position. The second who won placed his man with the sun at his back and avoided putting him in disadvantageous terrain. It was believed that it was easier to hit a man if the clothes he was wearing contrasted strongly with his background or if he stood upon a path or in front of a vertical object, which was believed to focus the aim. A story is told of a dashing Captain Kirby, who, to the opposing second's question, "Gentlemen, are you ready?" replied, "No, sir, I am not ready as we stand. You have placed my opponent in a line with that column, and I could hardly miss him if I tried." Once the problem was rectified, the duel proceeded, and both men were severely wounded.[18]

Principals might be examined to ensure that they wore no sort of protective cuirass concealed under their clothes. It was not unheard of for men to wind several yards of silk around their waist or to line the insides of their shirts with layers of heavy paper. They were also expected to remove coins, watches, or other items from their pockets that might stop a bullet, an occurrence that pops up with such frequency in dueling stories that it strains credulity.

It is commonly assumed that duelists had to use pistols from a matched pair. This eventually became common practice but was not early on. In 1790, Lt. Samuel Stanton's *Principles of Duelling* assumed that each principal would use his own pistols, as long as they were "of similar sizes in every respect, both as to the bore, and the length of barrel,"[19] but in 1836 Chatauvillard wrote, "The weapons must be equal and even from the same pair; however, it may be agreed, in advance, that each party will be allowed to use his own." In at least half the duels this author has researched, principals used their own weapons, and when duelists did share one set of pistols it was often because that was all they could procure. The practice of using pistols from a matched set became more common in dueling's later days, when cases of pistols were borrowed from a third party so that neither man had the advantage of familiarity with them.

Pistols were loaded by the seconds in each other's presence to be sure that the weapons were properly primed and that the powder charges and bullets were equal; there were cases in which it turned out an unscrupulous duelist had loaded his pistols with shot.[20] The spare pistol would usually be loaded and kept in reserve for a second exchange. In later days, the pistols were often loaded in advance by a gunsmith and brought to the grounds sealed in their cases.

The second handed his principal the pistol at full-cock and often even set the hair trigger. The principal was supposed to receive his pistol in his weak hand and transfer it to his shooting hand, keeping it carefully pointed at the ground at all times. A negligent discharge on the dueling ground could cause considerable embarrassment. One of the more famous such incidents was in the 1826 duel between Senators John Randolph and Henry Clay, when Randolph accidentally fired his pistol into the ground while he was adjusting it to his grip. Clay excused the shot as clearly unintentional, setting a conciliatory tone for the bloodless duel that followed.

Seconds took their places out of the line of fire, perpendicular to the center point, perhaps 8 to 10 yards to the side. They were armed to ensure that the rules were observed.

In early duels, principals often leveled their pistols at each other while awaiting the signal. Later, it became customary for them to point them at the ground a short distance in front of their feet, raising them upon the signal to fire, or, alternatively, point them skyward and then lowering them on the word.

It was a rule of thumb that the duel should occur within 10 minutes of the parties' arrival, probably out of regard for the principals' nerves. As one observer noted acidly, "The hurry in which these 'affairs of honor' . . . are often arranged allows no time for reflection, and enables a man in possession of a palpitating heart and trembling knee to pull a trigger at command, who would be incapable of defending himself against a swordsman, or of using a sword himself with any share of success; and there can be no doubt that countless poltroons have been converted into heroes by pistol-dueling, which they have fought under the influence of dissembled anger and real fear."[21]

Customarily the duelist stood with his right side to his opponent, as in fencing, in order to expose the smallest possible target. The logic of this was protested by the rotund Charles James Fox before his duel with William Adam. When his second told him to stand sideways, Fox replied, "Come, man, I am as thick one way as the other!"[22]

There were refinements to the sideways, or "feathered," stance. The arm holding the pistol was bent at the elbow so that it would provide maximum cover to the upper chest. The head was sunk down as much as possible to be covered by the gun hand. The belly was drawn in and the hips twisted slightly to shield the lower abdomen behind the pelvis. Beyond this, the duelist might lean into his shot in a lunging posture, diminishing his height by a foot or more. George Robert ("Fighting") Fitzgerald was a master of this technique (see Chapter 55 for more on Fitzgerald).

There was an argument against the sideways position, and it was made by Sir Lucius O'Trigger, the fire-eating second, to Bob Acres, his timorous principal, in Richard Sheridan's *The Rivals.* When Bob demonstrates his oblique stance, Sir Lucius observes, "Well, now if I hit you in the body, my bullet has a double chance—for if it misses a vital part of your right side, 'twill be very hard if it don't succeed on the left!" Positioning Bob to face front, he points out, "But, there—fix yourself so—let him see the broad-side of your full front. . . . Now a ball or two may pass clean through your body, and never do any harm at all . . . and it is much the genteelest attitude into the bargain."

To which Bob protests, "Look'ee! Sir Lucius—I'd just as lieve be shot in an awkward posture as a genteel one; so, by my valour I will stand edgeways."

The signal to fire was usually along the lines of, "Gentlemen, are you ready? Fire . . . one . . . two . . . three!" The pistol could not be brought on target until after the word "fire" and could not be fired until after the count. If a principal violated either prohibition and killed his foe, he could be tried as a murderer.

Another matter to be decided by lot was which of the seconds would give the word of command, the advantage being that the principal would be familiar with his second's voice and also with his mode of delivery—fast or slow, with an escalating or de-escalating cadence.

Instead of a command, a visual signal was sometimes used, such as dropping a handkerchief. This was considered more sporting because the principals were forced to focus their attention on the handkerchief rather than on each other until the moment came.

Steinmetz advised duelists to pick a particular point on their opponent's coat, perhaps a button or a grease spot, as an aiming point. He believed that "a person can never fire with accuracy unless he aims at some *small* object."[23] He also instructed the duelist not to squeeze the grip too hard and, when he fired, to take care to move only his trigger finger, and that with only enough pressure to drop the hammer. If he fired first, he should hold his pistol in position until after his opponent had fired, to take advantage of the cover it offered his head.

Most codes counted a misfire as a shot. Andrew Jackson famously violated this dictum in his 1806 duel with Charles Dickinson. Jackson held his shot until after Dickinson fired, but when he pulled the trigger his hammer dropped to half-cock (a sort of safety position). Jackson thumbed back the hammer and pulled the trigger again, mortally wounding Dickinson. Clearly, Jackson was more intent on killing his opponent than in observing the finer points of the code. No one, though, was more stubborn in his refusal to let a misfire discourage him than the famed Irish duelist Beauchamp Bagenal during his alternate-fire duel with Col. John de Blacquiere in 1773:

> Colonel Blacquiere having fired his pistol, Mr. Bagenal missed fire; Mr. Bagenal cocked it again and it missed fire again, and again. Then the Colonel recommended him to examine his flint, which he did, knocking it with a key to make it give fire which upon the next trial it still failed to do. At the Colonel's request Mr. Bagenal then changed his flint and after this was done Mr. Bagenal having pulled his trigger six times his pistol at length went off, and after that his second pistol which hit the Colonel's hat very near the temple. Notwithstanding all this provocation the Colonel refused to fire his second pistol at Mr. Bagenal to whom he declared he bore no sort of enmity.[24]

Sometimes the offender chose either to hold his fire or to "throw his shot away," sending it harmlessly into the air, which as noted earlier was called deloping. The man who intended to delope was supposed to keep it to himself until the last moment, as it otherwise rendered the duel "child's play."

Lord Winchelsea, the offending party, deloped in his 1829 duel with the Duke of Wellington. Afterward, his second explained that Winchelsea felt that the injury he had done the duke was too serious for a mere verbal apology and that he therefore felt required to receive the duke's fire before making it.

A delope would seem to be the most gracious possible gesture, but it was sometimes regarded as a sign of disdain. The challenger could not insist on a further exchange after a delope and might feel deprived of his due satisfaction, as did Col. Charles Lenox in his duel with the Duke of York, described in this volume. Worse, if a duelist killed an opponent who had deloped, it put a terrible onus on him. A tragic example was the 1821 duel between John Scott and Jonathan Christie, which was fought by moonlight. At the first exchange Scott could not see that Christie had aimed to his side. Neither man was hit, and as they prepared for a second exchange Scott heard Christie's second, James Traill, say, "Now, Mr. Christie, take your aim, and do not throw away your advantage as you did last time."

Scott called out, "What! Did Mr. Christie not fire at me?"

Scott's second, Peter G. Patmore, who did not hear Traill's statement, hushed Scott and told him to take his shot. The signal was given, both men fired, and Scott mortally wounded his opponent. When he learned that Christie had deloped, he was in anguish. "Why was I permitted to fire a second time?" he cried. "I discharged my pistol down the field before: I could do no more. [Evidently Scott too had deloped.] I was compelled to fire in my own defence."[25]

Deloping turns up regularly in dueling accounts, though it is explicitly banned by rule 13 of the Irish Code: "No dumb shooting or firing in the air is admissible in any case. The challenger ought not to have challenged without receiving offense; and the challenged ought, if he gave offense, to have made an apology before he came on the ground; therefore, children's play must be dishonorable on one side or the other, and is accordingly prohibited."

In most cases duelists preferred to wound rather than kill their opponents; "good hits but no lives lost" was the ideal outcome. While a duel without hits had a tinge of farce, a duel that resulted in death could have serious moral and legal ramifications. Mark Twain recalled hearing a veteran duelist advise a neophyte, "Take all the risks of getting murdered yourself, but don't run any risk of murdering the other man. If you survive a duel you want to survive it in such a way that the memory of it will not linger along with you through the rest of your life and interfere with your sleep. Aim at your man's leg; not at the knee, not above the knee; for those are dangerous spots. Aim below the knee; cripple him, but leave the rest of him to his mother."[26]

One also had to anticipate the possibility of receiving rather than delivering a wound. As one wag mused:

> It is a very brave thing to fight a duel, but uncomfortable. If a man could be sure of a ball in the right quarter—say the fleshy part of the arm, or of the thigh, or a grazing shot upon one of the ribs; or, indeed, a ball plump through the heart; or not hit at all—it would be well enough. But it is not pleasant to anticipate (especially if one has a slight acquaintance with anatomy) a bullet in the shoulder-joint, occasioning infinite pain and a crippled limb for life: or a ball in the hip, badly scratching the femoral artery and bloating up into aneurisms; or in the articulation of the lower jaw, splintering bones of importance; or one in the lungs, producing great wheezing and weak wind for the residue of life; or in the stomach, allow-

> ing much gastric juice to escape and spoiling all thought of dinner forever.[27]

After they fired, principals had to remain at their positions while their seconds determined whether either shot had struck home. If a man had been hit, one authority advised that "he must not allow himself to be alarmed or confused, but summoning up all his resolution, treat the matter coolly; and if he dies, go off with as good a grace as possible."[28] Ideally he would express any apologies necessary, forgive his opponent, and wish him well. A man of honor was defined by how he faced death, and an exemplary departure greatly enhanced his reputation.

If a man was wounded before he fired, he could still take his shot if he was able. He was allowed at most two minutes, while his opponent remained in place.

If neither party was hit in the initial exchange, the second of the challenged man would approach the second of the challenger and say something like, "Our friends have exchanged shots; are you satisfied, or is there any cause why the contest should be continued?" If the grounds for the meeting were not particularly serious, the challenger's second might agree to a reconciliation. If he did not, the duel could continue through two more exchanges or until one of the principals was hit. To have more than three exchanges was generally frowned upon, as it appeared barbarous if it resulted in injury and foolish if it did not.

In the British Isles and America, where pistol duels were fought seriously and fatalities were a regular occurrence, dueling fell out of fashion earlier than it did elsewhere. The French retained the pistol as an alternative to the sword but took measures to ensure that a hit was unlikely. The 1878 duel in France between Gambetta and de Fourtou, so memorably satirized by Twain in *The Tramp Abroad*, was fought at 30 paces, and Gambetta's second had originally proposed 35. To further minimize the possibility of anything but a random hit, French gunsmiths reportedly lent out sets of dueling pistols with unusually heavy trigger pulls, bores badly pitted, and weighted hammers that would jar the aim as they fell.

In Cuba, where duels were fought until the mid-20th century, pistols were loaded so lightly that a bullet would barely break the skin, but even so they were considered a risky weapon, only to be used in extreme cases, since "there is always the danger that even the best shot may, in the excitement of the moment, hit his opponent in a vital spot."[29] Such a mishap occurred in a 1914 duel in Budapest, when two brothers-in-law, Mr. Babocsay and Lieutenant Hadju, fought over a minor provocation. The distance was set at 50 yards, which should have sufficed for safety, but in the second exchange Babocsay killed his opponent with a quick, unaimed shot.[30]

Many came to feel that the pistol was an unsatisfactory weapon for a civilized duel. As one commentator put it, "With the pistol there is no alternative between atrocity and ridicule. The sword is satisfied with a few drops of blood, but it must have those few drops. The pistol sheds floods of blood or nothing at all."[31]

NOTES

1. The caliber represents a decimal fraction of an inch. Earlier holster pistols tended to be of larger caliber, in the mid-.60 range, while later model dueling pistols might be as small as .36 caliber.
2. John Atkinson, *Duelling Pistols and Some of the Affairs They Settled*, 94.
3. Ibid., 43.
4. *The Art of Dueling*, 49.
5. Atkinson, *Duelling Pistols*, 95.
6. Williams, "The Code of Honor in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," 118.
7. J. Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 97.
8. Hogan, "Rampant Individualism in the State of Texas," 464.
9. Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions*, 686.
10. Ben Truman, *Field of Honor*, 562.

11. Thomas J. Kirkland, *Historic Camden* (Camden, SC: Kershaw County Historical Society, 1994): 233–234.
12. Burton, *The Sentiment of the Sword*, chapt. 6, pt. 2.
13. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, 66.
14. “A Late Captain in the Army,” *General Rules and Instructions for All Seconds in Duels* (Whitehaven, UK: John Ware, 1793): 28.
15. “Historical Chronicle,” *Gentleman’s Magazine* 22 (May 1752): 236.
16. Baldick, *Duel*, 157.
17. Col. James J. Ayers, *Gold and Sunshine, Reminiscences of Early California* (Boston: R. G. Badger, 1922): 113.
18. “A Few Snap-shots,” *Overland* 9 (September 1872): 253.
19. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, 72.
20. Ibid., 73.
21. “Philosophy of the Pistol,” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* 10 (August 1857): 255–256.
22. Truman, *Field of Honor*, 554.
23. Steinmetz, *Romance of Duelling*, 1:83.
24. Philip H. Bagenal, *Vicissitudes of an Anglo-Irish Family, 1530–1800* (London: Ingleby, 1925): 152–153.
25. Leonidas M. Jones, “The Scott-Christie Duel,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 12 (Winter 1971): 605.
26. *Mark Twain’s Autobiography* (New York: Gabriel Wells, 1925): 353–354.
27. Donald Grant Mitchell, *Fudge Doings: Being Tony Fudge’s Record of the Same* (New York: C. Scribner, 1855): 225.
28. *The Art of Duelling*, 46.
29. “The Cuban Duel as a Sport,” *Literary Digest* 52 (April 22, 1916): 1178.
30. “Duel Between Brothers-in-Law,” *Times* (London), February 23, 1914, p. 8, col. 3.
31. Child, “Duelling in Paris,” 519.

24

SIR JONAH BARRINGTON VS. RICHARD DALY

LATE 1770s

WILLIAM BARRINGTON VS. CAPT. ROBERT ROLLO GILLESPIE

APRIL 1787

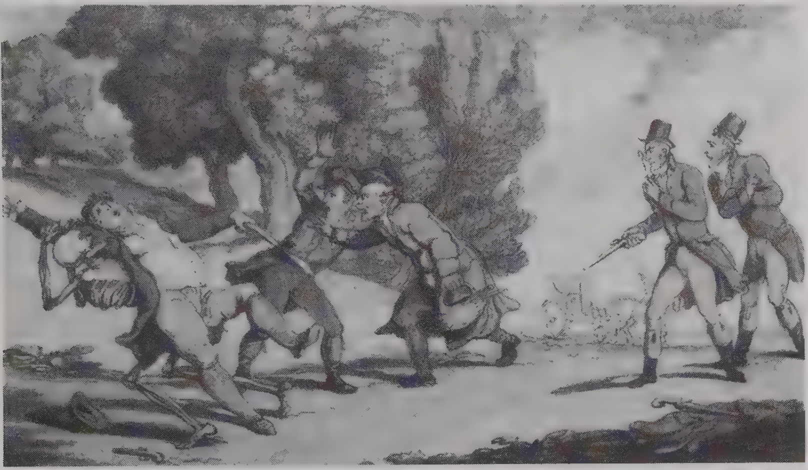
Born in 1760 in Abbeyleix, Ireland, Sir Jonah Barrington grew up taking dueling very much for granted. As he wrote in his memoir, *Personal Sketches of His Own Times*:

> It is, in fact, incredible what a singular passion the Irish gentlemen (though in general excellent-tempered fellows) formerly had for fighting each other and immediately making friends again. . . . When men had a glowing ambition to excel in all manner of feats and exercises they naturally conceived that manslaughter, in an *honest* way (that is, not knowing *which* would be slaughtered), was the most chivalrous and gentlemanly of all their accomplishments. No young fellow could finish his education till he had exchanged shots

> with some of his acquaintances. . . . The two first questions always asked as to a young man's respectability and qualifications, particularly when he proposed for a lady wife, were, "What family is he of?" and "Did he ever blaze?"[1]

In his memoir, Barrington included a transcript of the Irish dueling code, which had been drawn up by a committee of gentlemen meeting at the Clonmell Summer Assizes in 1777. Called the Thirty-Six Commandments,[2] it was distributed to gentlemen's clubs with the suggestion that members make a copy of it to keep in their pistol cases. Barrington's father provided him with one when he went off to Trinity College in Dublin. There he fought his first duel, with fellow student Richard Daly:

> Richard Daly] had the greatest predilection for single combat of any person (not a society fire-eater) I ever recollect: he had fought 16 duels in the space of two years—three with swords and 13 with pistols—yet, with so little skill or so much good fortune, that not a wound worth mentioning occurred in the course of the whole. . . . I was surprised one winter's evening at college by receiving a written challenge in the nature of an *invitation* from Mr. Daly to fight him early the ensuing morning. I never had spoken a word to him in my life, and scarcely *of* him, and no possible cause of quarrel that I could guess existed between us. However, it being then a decided opinion that a first overture of that nature could *never* be declined, I accepted the *invitation* without any inquiry—writing, in reply, that as to place, I chose the field of Donnybrook fair as the fittest spot for *all* sorts of *encounters*.[3]
>
> I had then to look out for a second, and resorted



"The Fighting Duel" by Thomas Rowlandson.

to a person with whom I was very intimate, and who, as he was a curious character, may be worth noticing. . . . Crosby was of immense stature; being above six feet three inches high; he had a comely-looking, fat, ruddy face, and was, beyond all comparison, the most ingenious mechanic I ever knew. He had a smattering of all sciences, and there was scarcely an art or a trade of which he had not some practical knowledge. His chambers at college were like a general workshop for all kinds of artizans. He was very good-tempered, exceedingly strong, and as brave as a lion, but as dogged as a mule. Nothing could change a resolution of his, when once made, and nothing could check or resist his perseverance to carry it into execution. He highly approved of my promptness in accepting Daly's invitation, but I told him that I unluckily had no pistols, and did not know where to procure any against the next morning. This puzzled him; but on recollection he said he had no complete pistols neither, but he had some *old locks, barrels, and stocks*, which, as they did not originally belong to each other, he should find it very difficult to make anything of, nevertheless he would fall to work directly. He kept me up till late at night in his chambers to help him in filing the old locks and barrels, and endeavouring to patch up two or three of them so as to go off and answer that individual job. Various trials were made; much filing, drilling, and scanning were necessary. However, by two o'clock in the morning we had completed three entire pistols, which, though certainly of various lengths and of the most ludicrous workmanship, struck their fire *right well*, and that was all we wanted of them—symmetry (as he remarked) being of no great value upon *these* occasions.

It was before seven o'clock on the 20th of March, with a cold wind and a sleety atmosphere, that we set out on foot for the field of Donnybrook fair, after having taken some good chocolate and a plentiful draught of cherry brandy, to keep the cold wind out. On arriving, we saw my antagonist and his friend (Jack Patterson, nephew to the chief justice) already on the ground. I shall never forget Daly's figure. He was a very fine looking young fellow, but with such a squint that it was totally impossible to say what he looked at, except his nose, of which he never lost sight. His dress (they had come in a coach) made me ashamed of my own: he wore a pea-green coat; a large tucker with a diamond brooch stuck in it; a three-cocked hat with a gold button-loop and tassels; and silk stockings; and a *couteau-de-chasse*[4] hung gracefully dangling from his thigh. In fact, he looked as if already standing in a state of triumph, after having vanquished and trampled on his antagonist. I did not half-like his steady position, showy surface, and mysterious squint; and I certainly would rather have exchanged *two shots* with his slovenly friend, Jack Patterson, than *one* with so magnificent and overbearing an adversary.

My friend Crosby, without any sort of salutation or prologue, immediately cried out, "Ground, gentlemen! ground, ground! damn measurement!" and placing me on his selected spot, whispered into my ear, "*Medio tutissimus ibis*" [the middle course is the safest]: never look at the head or the heels: *hip* the macaroni! the hip for ever, my boy! hip, hip!"—when my antagonist's second, advancing and accosting mine, said Mr. Daly could not think of going any further with the business; that he found it was totally a mistake on his part, originating through misrepresentation, and that he begged to say he was extremely sorry for having given Mr. Barrington and his friend the trouble of coming out, hoping they would excuse it and shake hands with him. To this arrangement, I certainly had no sort of objection; but Crosby, without hesitation, said, "We cannot do that *yet*, sir: I'll *show* you we *can't*" (taking a little manuscript book out of his breeches pocket), "there's the *rules!*—look at that, Sir," continued he, "see No. 7: 'no apology can be received *after* the parties meet, *without a fire.*' You see, there's the rule," pursued Crosby, with infinite self-satisfaction; "and a young man on his *first blood* cannot break rule, particularly with a gentleman so used to the sport as Mr. Daly. Come, gentlemen, proceed! proceed!"

Daly appeared much displeased, but took his ground, without speaking a word, about nine paces from me. He presented his pistol instantly, but gave me most gallantly a full front.

It being, as Crosby said, my first blood, I lost no

> time, but let fly without a single second of delay and without taking aim. Daly staggered back two or three steps, put his hand to his breast, cried, "I'm hit, sir!" and did not fire. Crosby gave me a slap on the back which staggered me, and a squeeze of the hand which nearly crushed my fingers. We got round him: his waistcoat was opened, and a black spot about the size of a crown-piece, with a little blood, appeared directly on his breastbone. I was greatly shocked: fortunately, however, the ball had not penetrated; but his brooch had been broken, and a piece of the setting was sticking fast in the bone. Crosby stamped, cursed the damp powder or under-loading, and calmly pulled out the brooch.
>
> Daly said not a word, put his cambric handkerchief doubled to his breast, and bowed. I returned the salute, extremely glad to get out of the scrape, and so we parted without conversation or ceremony, save that when I expressed my wish to know the cause of his challenging me, Daly replied that he would *now* give no such explanation; and *his* friend then produced his book of rules, quoting No. 8: "If a party challenged accepts the challenge without asking the reason of it, the challenger is never bound to divulge it afterwards."[5]

Despite Barrington's lighthearted approach to dueling, he knew too well its tragic side. At a dinner party at the home of Capt. Robert Rollo Gillespie in April 1787, his younger brother William began arguing with a Mr. McKenzie. The dispute got out of hand, and a meeting was proposed. Gillespie, though a close friend of William's, inexplicably volunteered to second for McKenzie, a relative stranger.

In front of a large crowd of spectators, the principals exchanged two fires without effect. William then suggested that he hoped they had paid sufficient homage to their respective honors and extended his hand in friendship. At this point Gillespie intervened, insisting that McKenzie should not be satisfied, and that the affair should proceed. While arguing that he considered the matter concluded, William directed some "harsh expressions" toward his friend Gillespie, including, "You are a coward in a regiment of cowards." To an officer, this was an unforgivable insult. Enraged, Gillespie pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and, holding one corner, waved it at William, asking if he dared grab the other—proposing a duel au mouchoir. When William playfully snatched at the handkerchief Gillespie instantly shot him in the heart, at such short range that William's coat was scorched. As he fell, William's pistol discharged, shooting the hammer off Gillespie's. William was carried to a nearby cabin and died later that evening, in great agony. As Jonah Barrington wrote, "The whole circumstance of a second killing a principal because he desired reconciliation was, and remains, totally unexampled in the history of dueling, even in the most barbarous eras and countries."[6]

As soon as he heard what had happened, Jonah Barrington set out in search of Gillespie, thirsting for vengeance. However, he was unable to find him, as had gone into hiding. He obtained a murder warrant against him and published wanted notices widely. Gillespie eventually surrendered, and the trial was held at the Spring Assizes of 1788. The 12-man jury included 10 military officers. As Barrington wrote, "They could not acquit; they *would* not convict." The verdict was "justifiable homicide."

Captain Gillespie pleaded his majesty's pardon and returned to service. Through his spectacular valor in India he rose to the rank of general, died in battle, and was honored with a monument in Westminster Abbey. It was Barrington's bitter contention that Gillespie never recovered his peace of mind after the wanton slaying, leading him into suicidal foolhardiness. Barrington wrote, "*Requiescat in pace!*—but never will I set my foot in Westminster Abbey."[7]

Barrington tool an active interest in politics and was elected to represent Tuam in the Irish House of Commons in 1790. He lost his seat in 1797, but was returned the following year. Campaigns provided the provocation for numerous duels, and, during one of them a friend, H.D. Grady, sent him a case of pistols in the event he had to exchange fire with his opponent. The package included a half-dozen ready-made bullets, which Grady explained were "to keep you going while others are preparing," and he signed off with, "Be bold, wicked, steady, and *fear naught!*"

Barrington rose to the position of chief judge of the Admiralty and was knighted in 1807. Despite his success, his free-spending ways left him in constant difficulty. He wrote his memoirs with the hope that it would rescue him financially, which may explain why some of his stories were rendered a bit more colorfully than the facts might justify. Alas, it was not only in the area of storytelling that Barrington proved unreliable: in 1830 he was convicted of embezzling government funds and dismissed from his position. He left Ireland in disgrace and settled in France, where he died in 1834.

NOTES

1. William Barrington, *Personal Sketches*, 1:272–273.
2. Despite the title, the code contains only 26 rules. Barrington acknowledges that he may not have remembered all of them. No copy of the Irish Code exists outside of Barrington's transcription, published in 1827. The code is available online at http://indigo.ie/ ~ kfinlay/jbarrington/jonah38.htm.
3. Donnybrook was so famous for the fights that broke out there that it became synonymous with a brawl.
4. *Couteau-de-chasse* literally means "hunting knife," but it refers to a thrusting sword similar to a smallsword.
5. Barrington, *Personal Sketches*, 1:281–284.
6. This is Barrington's version of events, written partly in answer to a glowing biography of Sir Rollo Gillespie published in 1816, which stated that

it was William Barrington who challenged Gillespie. According to this account, Gillespie knew that Barrington had been taking target practice and for that reason insisted that the duel be fought over a handkerchief. Both men fired simultaneously, Barrington's ball glancing off a button on Gillespie's coat. See Sir William Thorne, *A Memoir of Major-General Sir R.R. Gillespie* (T. Egerton, London, 1816): 14–19.

7. Barrington, *Personal Sketches*, 1:88–94.

25

DUKE OF YORK VS. LT. COL. CHARLES LENOX

MAY 26, 1789

LT. COL. CHARLES LENOX VS. THEOPHILUS SWIFT

JULY 1, 1789

In an aristocracy, Julian Pitt-Rivers wrote, “the king can do no wrong because he is the king and therefore the arbiter of right.”[1] He could not be dishonored because he was the font of honor. Loyalty demanded that his behavior not be judged, and he was beyond insult or challenge. This status extended to those in a direct line for the throne, and so it sent shock waves through English society when Frederick, Duke of York, the second son of George III, accepted a challenge from an officer under his command, fought a duel with him, and narrowly escaped death.

The trouble began when the duke, who was colonel of the Coldstream Guards Regiment, publicly commented that Lt. Col. Charles Lenox, who was under his command, had failed to respond properly to an insult. As the duke put it, “language had been used at d'Aubigny's Club towards Lieutenant Colonel Lenox to which no gentleman ought to submit." Lenox was at a loss as to how to respond, as he had no idea what incident the duke was referring to or whom to hold responsible. And so, on May 15, 1789, when the regiment was on parade, Lenox approached the duke, "desiring to know what were the words which he, Colonel Lenox, had submitted to hear, and by whom were they spoken?"

The duke gave no reply but ordered him back to his post.

After the parade, the duke went to the orderly room and said to Lenox, "When not on duty I wear a brown coat, and have none of the paraphernalia of rank; neither shall the position which I hold in the army exempt me from any obligation which I may owe as a private gentleman."

In an attempt to avoid the necessity of challenging the duke, Lenox sent a letter to each member of d'Aubigny's asking if he had heard the words to which the duke alluded. Receiving no response, Lenox wrote the duke that "his royal highness should contradict the report as publicly as he had asserted it." When the duke refused, Lenox challenged him. The duke accepted, keeping the affair secret from other members of the royal family.

A procès-verbal was drawn up afterward that described the duel:

> In consequence of a dispute already known to the public, his Royal Highness the Duke of York, attended by Lord Rawdon, and Lieutenant Colonel Lenox, accompanied by the Earl of Winchelsea, met at Wimbledon Common. The ground was measured at twelve paces; and both parties were to fire at a signal agreed upon. The signal being given, Lieutenant Colonel Lenox fired, and his ball grazed his Highness's curl. The Duke of York did not fire. Lord Rawdon then interfered, and said he thought enough had been done. Lieutenant Colonel Lenox observed that his Highness had not fired:

> Lord Rawdon said, it was not the Duke's intention to fire; his Royal Highness had come out, upon Lieutenant Colonel Lenox's desire, to give him satisfaction, and had no animosity against him. Lieutenant Colonel Lenox pressed that the Duke of York should fire, which was declined upon a repetition of the reason. Lord Winchelsea then went up to the Duke of York and expressed his hope that his Royal Highness could have no objections to say he considered Lieutenant Colonel Lenox as a man of honour and courage. His Royal Highness replied that he should say nothing: he had come out to give Lieutenant Colonel Lenox satisfaction, and did not mean to fire at him: If Lieutenant Colonel Lenox was not satisfied, he might fire again. Lieutenant Colonel Lenox said he could not possibly fire again at the Duke, as his Royal Highness did not mean to fire at him. On this, both parties left the ground. The seconds think it proper to add that both parties behaved with the most perfect coolness and intrepidity.[2]

A few days afterward, the officers of Lenox's regiment met at his request to discuss whether his behavior in the affair had been that of an officer and a gentleman. They resolved that "it is the opinion of His Majesty's Coldstream regiment of Guards that Lieutenant Colonel Lenox, subsequent to the fifteenth of May, has behaved with *courage*; but, from the peculiarity of the circumstance, not with *judgment.*"

Colonel Lenox soon transferred out of the duke's regiment.

A pamphlet published that same year, *A Short Review of the Recent Affair of Honor Between His Royal Highness the Duke of York and Lieutenant Colonel Lenox*, was scathing in its criticism of the Duke of York. The author is identified only as "a Captain of a Company in One of the Regiments of Guards," but he writes with such personal outrage that one suspects it was Lenox himself. He characterized the conclusion of the duel thus:

> His Highness went out to give satisfaction to Colonel Lenox, for a wanton and ungrounded aspersion of his character. There were three ways of doing this, any one of which would have answered the purpose of the meeting.
>
> The first was, by a compliance with the established and acknowledged etiquette of duelling—that is, by a mutual discharge of pistols, until the injured person declares that he is satisfied.
>
> The second, by a generous acknowledgment of the honor and courage of his adversary, after the fire of the person injured has been given, and the aggressor has discharged his pistol in the air.
>
> The third, by a manly concession of the fabricated detraction.
>
> To acknowledge a fault requires a degree of magnanimity, and a certain amiable pliability of temper, which I believe to be foreign to the bosom of his Highness. It was not probable therefore that the last-recited measure would be embraced; but *one* of the two former it was incumbent upon him to adopt. He chose, however, to reject them *all*; and with the ungenerous view of embarrassing his adversary, he has placed his own honor and courage in a very *questionable light.*[3]

Theophilus Swift, an Irish barrister then practicing in England, was so outraged that Lenox would fight a duel with the Duke of York that he wrote a pamphlet denouncing Lenox and suggesting that every man who loved the royal family should challenge him until one succeeded in killing him.

In response, Lenox challenged Swift, and on July 1 they fought, as reported in *Gentleman's Magazine*:

> They met at five o'clock yesterday afternoon, in a field near the Uxbridge Road; Mr. Swift attended by Sir William Augustus Browne, and Lieut. Colonel Lenox, by Lieut. Col. Phipps. Sir William Brown observing that Col. Lenox's pistols had sights, proposed that a pistol should be exchanged on each side, as Mr. Swift had given up the point of meeting with swords, which had originally been suggested by him, but objected to by Col. Phipps. A pistol was accordingly exchanged. Col. Phipps then asked Sir William Browne what distance he proposed; Sir William mentioned ten paces, which were measured by the seconds. Col. Lenox and Mr. Swift being called to take their ground, Sir William Brown asked in what manner Col. Lenox and Mr. Swift were to fire, whether at the same time or not. Col. Phipps stated that, from the degree of his injury, he conceived that Col. Lenox had a right to claim the first shot. Mr. Swift and Sir William Browne immediately agreed that Col. Lenox should fire first. The parties having taken their ground, Col. Lenox asked if Mr. Swift was ready?—On his answering that he was, Col. Lenox fired, and the ball took place in the body of Mr. Swift, whose pistol, on his receiving the wound, went off without effect. The parties then quitted the ground.[4]

Lenox succeeded to the title of fourth Duke of Richmond in 1806. In 1807 he was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and at his first levee, Swift, who had recovered from his wound, was introduced to him. Swift joked that the last time they had met, his lordship had provided better entertainment, for he had given him a ball. "True," responded the Duke of Richmond, "and now that I am Lord Lieutenant the least I can do is give you a brace of them!"

In due time Swift was invited to two balls at the palace.

NOTES

1. Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," 37.
2. *A Short Review of the Recent Affair of Honor Between His Royal Highness the Duke of York and Lieutenant Colonel Lenox* (London: J. Bell, 1789): 24–26.
3. Ibid., 19–21.
4. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59 (July 1789): 668.

26

THE DUELS OF COL. HENRY HERVEY ASTON

1790–1798

Henry Hervey Aston was born in 1760 at Aston Hall, Cheshire. He became a prominent member of London society, a dandy who reportedly never bought fewer than 20 shirts at a time. Commissioned a captain in the army in about 1784, he was promoted to colonel in 1786 and soon after was put in command at Tangore, India. In 1789 he married Harriet Ingram Sheperd, and the couple was among the favorites of George III.

Shortly before his wife gave birth to their first child, Aston fought a duel on June 25, 1790, at Chalk Farm[1] with a Lieutenant Fitzgerald of the 60th Regiment of Foot. It was his third, according to the *Times*, which reported:

> The dispute originated about a fortnight since at Ranelagh, where Mr. Aston, having drank rather freely, accosted Mr. Fitzgerald with "good night," which the latter considered as an insult, as he was a stranger. These words were repeated a second time, when Mr. Fitzgerald knocked Mr. Aston down with a thick stick. The latter having

> recovered himself, blows ensued, and Mr. Fitzgerald came off only second best.[2]

The distance was 10 yards. It was in the alternate-fire mode, both men starting with pistols leveled. Fitzgerald, who had the first shot, steadied his pistol on his left arm, took deliberate aim, and fired. The ball glanced off Aston's wrist, passed under his right cheekbone and through his neck. Had he not had his arm upraised, it might have killed him. Aston did not return fire but asked, "Are you satisfied?"

"I am satisfied," responded Fitzgerald.

Aston was helped off the field and into his carriage. Though severely wounded, he recovered, and before he returned to India the king begged him never again to fight a duel. However, eight years later Aston fought two duels on consecutive days while stationed in the East Indies. The following account is from the *Times*:

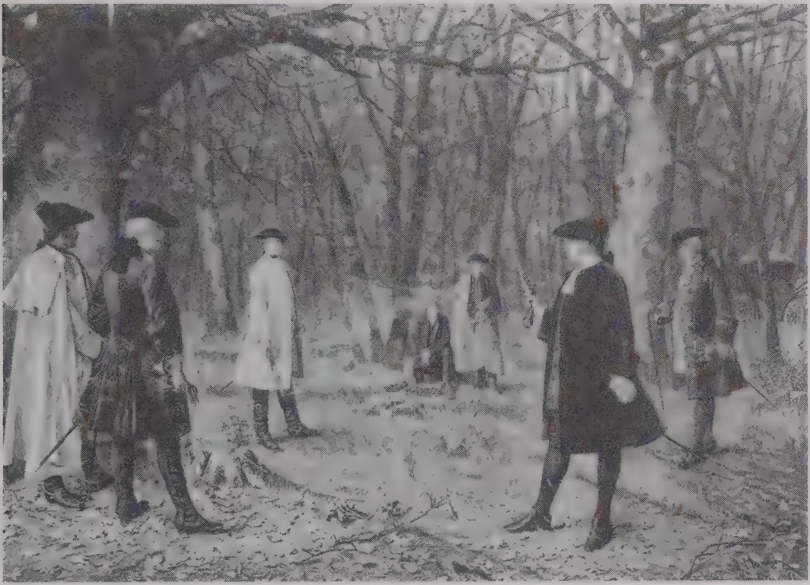
> In the absence of Colonel Aston from his regiment, Major Picton and Major Allan had a misunderstanding with a Lieutenant, which being communicated to Colonel Aston, he wrote his opinion, in a private letter, that the two Majors had acted rather illiberally to the young man. This letter was shewn; and the opinion of the Colonel coming to the ears of Majors Picton and Allan, they demanded a Court of Enquiry on their conduct, which the Commander in Chief thought proper to refuse. On Colonel Aston's return to Head Quarters, Major Picton called upon him for an explanation of the term "illiberal"—Colonel Aston said that he could not think it necessary to answer for his public conduct in the discharge of his duty as Colonel of his regiment to the officers of his corps; but if Major Picton had anything to allege against him as a private Gentleman, he

> was ready to give him every satisfaction in his power. They met the next day with their seconds.[3]

The date was December 22, 1798. The duel was in the alternate-fire mode, with Major Picton having the first shot. Col. Arthur Wellesley produced an official report:

> Major Picton's pistol missed fire; Colonel Aston desired him to try again; the seconds interfered, and declared he could not. Colonel Aston fired in the air, and said that he had no objection to declare that had no intention of offending Major Picton in that letter, and that he was ready to shake hands with him.
>
> Major Allan happened to be upon the ground, and saw everything that was done. On the same morning he called upon Colonel Aston, and desired to speak with him. He lamented . . . the unfortunate circumstances which had happened, and stated his wish to leave the corps. Colonel Aston recommended it to him to consider well before he took that step. After a conversation, which lasted about an hour and a half . . . in the course of which [Allan] urged Colonel Aston to [revoke] the expressions made use of in his letter . . . he at last said, "Colonel Aston, what is your private opinion of me?"
>
> Colonel Aston said, "I am not obliged to give you my private opinion upon any subject."
>
> "Then," said Major Allan, "will you give me a private meeting?"
>
> "Yes," replied Colonel Aston.[4]

They met the following day, and Major Allan had the first shot. After he fired, Aston showed no immediate sign of being hit. With the utmost composure he leveled his pistol at Allan to



A duel by alternate fire. From the author's collection.

show he could fire if he wished and then drew his arm back across his breast. He announced that "he was shot through the body—he believed the wound was mortal, and he therefore declined to fire, for it should not be said of him, that the last act of his life was an act of revenge."[5]

Aston slowly sat down on the ground and was carried home. The ball had entered his right side, penetrated his liver, gone through his backbone, turned, and lodged near his left hipbone. He suffered for a week before dying.

In conclusion, Colonel Wellesley wrote, "if anything can give Colonel Aston's friends consolation, it must be to learn that his moderation was as conspicuous as his coolness and that this misfortune was not occasioned by his fault."[6]

Aston left Wellesley his fine gray Arab, Diomed. More important, his death provided a leadership opening for the colonel, who performed with distinction at the siege of Seringapatam, commencing a stellar military career in which he became better known by his title, the Duke of Wellington. Evidently Aston's death did not persuade him of the futility of dueling: in 1829, as prime minister, he fought a bloodless duel with the Earl of Winchelsea.

NOTES

1. Just outside London, Chalk Farm had a field, screened from the road by trees, which became a popular dueling spot.
2. *Times* (London), June 28, 1790, p. 2, col. 3.
3. *Times* (London), June 11, 1799, p. 3, col. 1.
4. Steinmetz, *Romance of Duelling,* 2:62–63.
5. *Times* (London), June 11, 1799, p. 3, col. 1.
6. Steinmetz, *Romance of Duelling,* 2:63–64

27

LT. COL. ROBERT MONTGOMERY VS. CAPT. JAMES MACNAMARA

APRIL 6, 1803

History is rife with frivolous duels, in which a seemingly insignificant provocation resulted in death. Oft-cited examples include the Neapolitan nobleman who fought 14 duels in support of his contention that Dante was a greater poet than Ariosto, only to admit on his deathbed that he had not read the works of either; or the Irish officer in the Peninsular War who fought a man for disputing his contention that anchovies grew on trees and, after killing him, recalled that, actually, it was capers he was thinking of. Most such lists include Montgomery and Macnamara, two British officers who dueled as a result of a fight between their dogs.

On the afternoon of April 6, 1803, Lt. Col. Robert Montgomery, of the 9th Foot Regiment, and Capt. James Macnamara, Royal Navy, neither of whom knew the other, were riding in Hyde Park, each followed by his Newfoundland dog. When the two dogs began fighting, Montgomery leapt off his horse and managed to separate them, exclaiming angrily, "Whose dog is this?"

Macnamara rode up and stated, "It is my dog."

"If you do not call your dog off I shall knock him down."

"Have you the arrogance to say you will knock my dog down? You will have first to knock me down."

"Why don't you dismount, then, and take your dog away?"

"I am an officer in his majesty's service," replied Macnamara, "and unaccustomed to the use of such arrogant language."

"Sir, if you consider yourself aggrieved, you know where I live. You ought to take care of your dog."

"I shall do that, sir, without asking leave or receiving permission from you," answered Macnamara, enraged.

At this point Macnamara and Montgomery were surrounded by several other officers, and within minutes they had agreed to meet two hours later, with pistols. Captain Barry seconded Macnamara, Sir William Kinnaird seconded Montgomery, and Mr. Heaviside attended as the surgeon.

James Harding, a local vintner, provided eyewitness testimony at the inquest:

> I was at Chalk Farm on the Wednesday, half past six; I observed the party, Captain Macnamara, Colonel Montgomery, and three other gentlemen, ascending Primrose Hill. One of the party (Captain Barry) desired the servant to bring a case out of the chaise; this opened my eyes to the business. I stood about fifty yards distant from them; I saw Mr. [Kinnaird] and Captain Barry conversing together, and preparing the pistols; one was discharged to see whether they were in good condition; the parties separated to about six yards, . . . both fired at the same time; Colonel Montgomery fell; Captain Macnamara did not. I went up. Colonel Montgomery was extended on the ground, and, shortly after, Mr. Heaviside opened his waistcoat, and looked at his wound; it was on his right side; Mr. Heaviside administered relief to

> him, and then went to Captain Macnamara. I think he said he was wounded, and that he must bleed him. I assisted in carrying Colonel Montgomery; his eyes were fixed, and he was groaning.[1]

Montgomery was hit in the chest, and the ball went through his heart. He was carried to a nearby cottage, where he died within minutes.

Macnamara was hit on the right side, just above the hip, and the ball passed entirely through him. It carried part of his coat and waistcoat into the wound, and as it exited on the left side it took part of his leather breeches and the hip button away with it.

On April 22, having fully recovered from his wound, Macnamara was tried for murder at the Old Bailey. After the prosecution rested its case, he addressed the jury. His statement eloquently explained how, to the man of honor, what appeared to be a molehill may indeed have been a mountain:

> The origin of the difference, as you see it in the evidence, was insignificant. The heat of two persons, each defending an animal under his protection, was natural, and could not have led to any serious consequences. It was not the deceased's defending his own dog, nor his threatening to destroy mine, that led me to the fatal catastrophe; it was the defiance which most unhappily accompanied what was said. Words receive their interpretation from the avowed intention of the speaker. The offence was forced upon me by the declaration that he invited me to be offended, and challenged me to vindicate the offence by calling upon him for satisfaction. . . . I could well have overlooked that too if the world, in its present state, could have overlooked it also. I went into the field, therefore, with no determination or desire to take the life of my opponent, or to expose my

own. I went there in hopes of receiving some soothing satisfaction for what would otherwise have exposed me in the general feelings and opinions of the world. The deceased was a man of popular manners, as I have heard, and with a very general acquaintance. I, on the other hand, was in a manner a stranger in this great town, having been devoted from my infancy to the duties of my profession in distant seas. If, under these circumstances, words, which the deceased intended to be offensive, and which he repeatedly invited to be resented, had been passed by, and submitted to, they would have passed from mouth to mouth—have been even exaggerated at every repetition, and my honor must have been lost.

Gentlemen, I am a captain in the British navy. My character you can only hear from others; but to maintain any character, in that station, I must be respected. When called upon to lead others into honorable dangers, I must not be supposed to be a man who had sought safety by submitting to what custom has taught others to consider as a disgrace. I am not presuming to urge anything against the laws of God or of this land. I know that, in the eye of religion and reason, obedience to the law, though against the general feelings of the world, is the first duty, and ought to be the rule of action. But in putting a construction upon my motives, so as to ascertain the quality of my actions, you will make allowance for my situation. It is impossible to define in terms the proper feelings of a gentleman; but their existence have supported this happy country many ages, and she might perish if they were lost. . . . Gentlemen, I submit myself entirely to your judgment. I hope to obtain my liberty through your verdict; and to employ it with honor in the defence of the liberties of my country.[2]

Macnamara called upon Admirals Hood, Nelson, Hotham, and Minto, all of whom vouched for his excellent character. Said Nelson, "I have known Captain Macnamara nine years; he has been at various times under my command; during my acquaintance with him, I had not only the highest esteem and respect for him as an officer, but I always looked upon him as a gentleman who would not take affront from any man; yet, as I stand here before God and my country, I never knew or heard that he ever gave offence to man, woman, or child, during my acquaintance with him."[3]

Justice Heath, in summing up, said that "from the testimony of the witnesses, and by the prisoner's own admission, the jury must find a verdict of manslaughter." However, the jury was of a different opinion; after 15 minutes' deliberation they declared Macnamara not guilty.

NOTES

1. George Henry Borrow, *Celebrated Trials and Remarkable Cases of Criminal Jurisprudence from the Earliest Records to the Year 1825* (London: Knight & Lacey, 1825): 446–447.
2. Ibid., 447–448.
3. Ibid., 449.

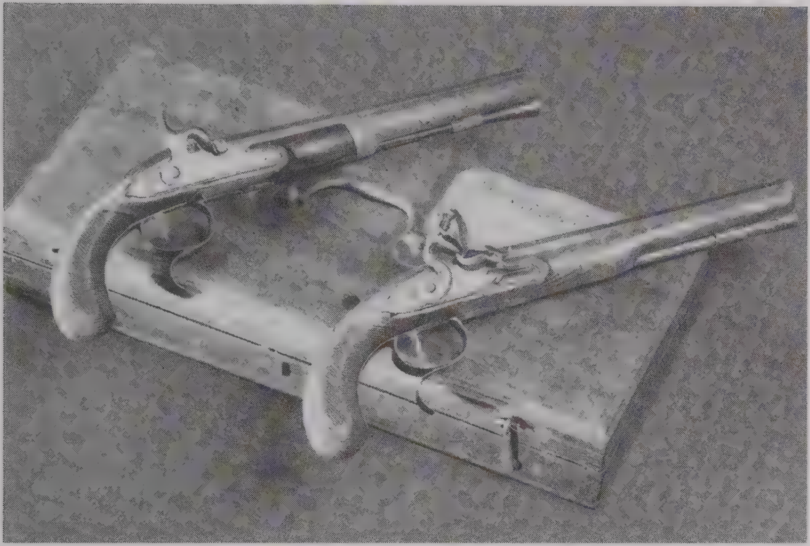
28

ALEXANDER HAMILTON VS. AARON BURR

JULY 11, 1804

Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr were both heroes of the American Revolution, but they allied themselves with opposing factions afterward: Hamilton with the Federalists, Burr the Jeffersonian Republicans. In 1791, Burr defeated Hamilton's father-in-law, Philip Schuyler, for the U.S. Senate from New York, after which Hamilton went out of his way to oppose him politically and to undermine his reputation. Hamilton claimed that Burr sought political power chiefly as a means to better himself financially, at whatever the cost to the Republic. During Burr's 1804 New York gubernatorial campaign Hamilton called him "profligate," a "voluptuary in the extreme," and a man of flawed character. Burr demanded a retraction, but in a lengthy exchange of letters, Hamilton expressed his unwillingness to disavow the statements.

Burr was known as a crack shot who had already fought two duels. The first was with John B. Church, Hamilton's brother-in-law and business partner, who was rumored to have "killed his man" back in England. Church had accused Burr of accepting a bribe while brokering a real estate deal, provoking



The Wogdon pistols owned by John B. Church and used in the Hamilton-Burr duel. During the Civil War, Church's grandson converted one to percussion fire for use as a sidearm. In 1930 they were sold to the Chase Manhattan Bank, founded by Aaron Burr. Courtesy of the archives of JPMorgan Chase Manhattan Bank.

a challenge. They met on September 2, 1799. While loading Burr's weapon, his second used a wad that made the bullet fit the bore so tightly he could not easily seat it. As he began hammering the ramrod home, Burr told him not to bother, as if he missed Church with the first exchange he would hit him with the next. In fact, Burr did miss, while Church's ball clipped a button from Burr's coat. Church then offered an apology, which Burr accepted. Burr is also reported to have fought a sword duel shortly before his duel with Hamilton, with a friend of the latter, Samuel Bradhurst, and to have wounded him slightly in the arm.

Hamilton had been a principal in 11 affairs of honor, all of which had been resolved peaceably, and had served as a second in two.[1] However, he could hardly have been blithe about the risk, as his 19-year-old son, Philip, had been killed in a duel not three years earlier. A staunch supporter of his father, Philip was a bright and accomplished young man in whom Alexander had placed high hopes. On November 20, 1801, he picked a quarrel at a New York City theater with George I. Eacker, a Burr supporter. Two days later Philip sent him a challenge.

They fought at Powles Hook, New Jersey, on the afternoon of November 23. Philip was mortally wounded in the first exchange. Thomas Rathbone, a friend of Philip's who visited him afterward, wrote, "On a Bed without curtains lay poor Phil, pale and languid, his rolling, distorted eyeballs darting forth the flashes of delirium—on one side of him on the same bed lay his agonized father—on the other, his distracted mother. . . . Yesterday, Tuesday, I was invited to attend his funeral. . . . His poor father was with difficulty supported to the grave of his hopes!"[2]

Nevertheless, when Burr sent Alexander Hamilton a challenge he accepted, despite the objections he enumerated the night before:

> First—My religious and moral purposes are strongly opposed to the practice of duelling; and it would ever give me pain to shed the blood of a fellow creature in a private combat forbidden by the laws.
>
> Secondly—My wife and children are extremely dear to me, and my life is of the utmost importance to them in various views.
>
> Thirdly—I feel a sense of obligation toward my creditors, who, in case of accident to me, by the forced sale of my property, may be in some degree sufferers. I did not think myself at liberty, as a man of probity, lightly to expose them to hazard.
>
> Fourthly—I am conscious of no ill-will to Colonel Burr distinct from political opposition, which, as I trust, has proceeded from pure and upright motives.

> Lastly—I hazard much, and can possibly gain nothing, by the issue of the interview.[3]

He then wrote a lengthy justification of his decision, concluding with "the ability to be in future useful, whether in resisting mischief or effecting good, in those crises of our public affairs which seem likely to happen, would probably be inseparable from a conformity with public prejudice in this particular."[4] In short, Hamilton was acknowledging that he had given Burr provocation and that if he failed to stand behind his words his credibility would be undermined. At the same time, he added, "I have resolved, if our interview is conducted in the usual manner, and it pleases God to give me the opportunity, to *reserve* and *throw away* my first fire, and *I have thoughts* even of *reserving* my second fire, *and* thus giving a double opportunity to Colonel Burr to pause and reflect. It is not, however, my intention to enter into any explanations on the ground. Apology, from principle, I hope, rather than pride, is out of the question."[5]

Hamilton's second, Nathaniel Pendleton, prepared this draft of the regulations for the duel:

> 1. To leave this Island from different points in two boats precisely at five o'clock on Saturday AM and to proceed to the place proposed. The party first arriving will wait the landing of the other; each boat shall be rowed by four confidential persons only, who shall remain in their respective boats until called for. These persons are not to be armed in any manner whatever. There will be but 7 persons in each boat. The principal, his second, one Surgeon and four oarsmen. The Surgeons may attend in Silence on the Ground.
> 2. The distance between the parties to be ten yards measured by the seconds, and the positions shall be directly marked.

3. The Seconds shall determine by lot the choice of positions.
4. The pistols shall not exceed 11 In. in the barrel. They are to be smooth bores, & to be loaded by the Seconds, in each others presence, shewing a smooth ball.
5. The gentlemen will stand correctly at their stations and receive their pistol. The Seconds having determined by lot who gives the words he to whom this lot falls shall take his position and shall distinctly ask the parties whether they are prepared. If they answer in the affirmative, He shall say "proceed" upon which the parties shall fire promptly—if one fires before the other, the opposite second shall say, one, two, three, fire, and he shall fire.
6. If either should be wounded before he has fired, and means to fire, he shall, if he can stand unsupported, be entitled to his shot, and not otherwise. If either has fired, is wounded and means to proceed he shall receive no assistance, his second will only exchange the pistol [for a loaded one]. If he falls forward the second will [repost] him.
7. At the exchange of pistols, the parties will resume their stations and the word given as in Article 5.
8. A snap or flash to be considered a fire. The Pistol not to be recovered [recocked].
9. Neither party to quit his Station until he is disqualified to proceed.[6]

Even though Hamilton owned a set of dueling pistols, he chose to use the set of Wogdons owned by Church, who had purchased them in London in the mid-1790s. They were in .544 caliber, with nine-inch barrels, set triggers, spurs on the trigger guards, and small front and rear sights. They also had weighted bronze fore-ends, an unusual feature that Church had had added to improve their balance. Wogdons were considered unusually accurate and were held in such awe that they inspired a poem, which began, "Hail Wogdon, Patron of that leaden death." The act of dueling itself was sometimes referred to as "going to Wogdon's court."

Hamilton left his home before dawn on July 11, 1804, without waking his wife, who knew nothing of the "interview." He boarded a skiff with Pendleton; his surgeon, Dr. David Hosack; and two oarsmen. They headed for the heights of Weehawken, New Jersey—more precisely, a narrow ledge, 10 feet wide and 40 feet long, about 20 feet above the river in the face of a sheer, 150-foot cliff. It was a secluded spot, ideal for their purposes.

Leaving Hosack and the oarsmen with the boat, Hamilton and Pendleton climbed to the ledge. Burr was already there, accompanied by his second, William Van Ness. While waiting, he had cleared away some brush and loose stones.

The seconds measured the distance. They cast lots for the choice of position and for the right to give the word, and both privileges fell to Pendleton. Pendleton inexplicably chose the northern position for Hamilton, forcing him to face the sun and its reflection off the river. As the principals stood at their stations, Pendleton read aloud the terms of the duel.

As he handed Hamilton his pistol, Pendleton asked if he should set the hair trigger. "Not this time," responded Hamilton, and then suddenly called out, "Stop; in certain states of the light one requires glasses."[7]

He leveled his pistol in several directions, as if to try the light, then took out a pair of spectacles, put them on, and again leveled his pistol in different directions—once, according to Van Ness, at his opponent, who waited patiently. Hamilton apologized for the delay and said, "This will do, now you may proceed."

Pendleton asked both men if they were prepared and, after each had answered in the affirmative, gave the order to fire.

The seconds were never able to agree on exactly what happened next. Pendleton insisted that Burr fired first and that Hamilton discharged his gun wildly, as the result of a muscle spasm. Burr and Van Ness gave a different account; according to their now generally accepted version of events, Hamilton fired first. Burr flinched, which he later rather unconvincingly attributed to a loose stone and a sprained ankle. Van Ness thought Burr had been hit, but Hamilton's shot was about 12 feet high and four feet to the side of Burr's position, clipping off a branch of a cedar tree. As Pendleton did not immediately begin his count, and as Hamilton was momentarily obscured by smoke, Burr waited a few seconds before firing. His bullet struck Hamilton in the right side, about four inches above the hip, fracturing his rib cage, perforating his liver, and lodging in his spine, shattering the second lumbar vertebra. He fell instantly.

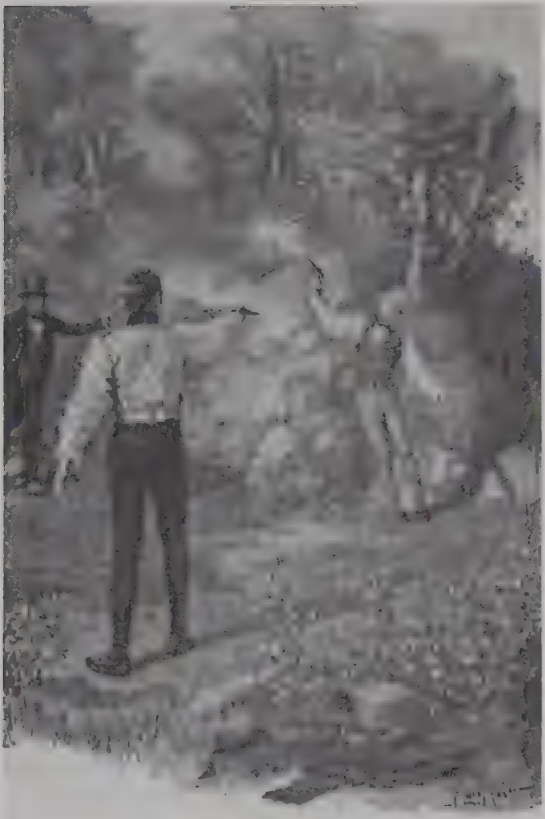
As his surgeon rushed to examine him, Hamilton said, "This is a mortal wound, Doctor."

Looking concerned, Burr advanced toward Hamilton but was stopped by his own second to prevent his being identified by Hosack or Hamilton's oarsmen, who were hurrying to the scene. Van Ness opened an umbrella and hustled Burr back to his boat under its concealment.

Hamilton was drifting in and out of consciousness as he was rowed across the river. At one point, he said, "Pendleton knows I did not mean to fire at Colonel Burr the first time." Seeing the pistol that had been in his hand lying on top of the case, he said, "Take care of that pistol; it is undischarged, and still cocked; it may go off and do harm," suggesting that he did not realize or recollect that he had fired it.

Hamilton was carried to the home of a friend, and his wife summoned. According to a letter written by Oliver Wolcott, who was present, "Mrs. Hamilton is with him, but she is ignorant of the cause of his Illness, which she supposes to be spasms—no one dare tell her the truth—it is feared she would become frantic." Surgeons from several French frigates anchored in the harbor were brought in to examine him, in hopes that their experience with gunshot wounds might prove helpful, but they could offer no hope for his survival. Hamilton, who did not belong to a church, summoned a friend, Bishop Moore, to administer Communion to him. Unwilling to appear to sanction dueling, the bishop would not administer the sacrament. Hamilton then summoned the Reverend Dr. John Mason, but he too refused. Hamilton died at 2 P.M. on July 12, after suffering 31 hours.

In death Hamilton was deified, while by killing him Burr made himself the most reviled figure in America. He was denounced in sermons and editorials as a base assassin and traitor, Cain and Benedict Arnold combined. Wild accusations were leveled, such as that he had worn a special bulletproof suit, shot Hamilton from ambush, or responded to his death with gales of laughter. It is clear, however, that under the



This illustration of the duel depicts Hamilton firing after he is shot by Burr.

code duello Burr had done nothing wrong. He had gone to the meeting in good faith and observed all the formalities. It was Hamilton who behaved oddly. If he did not intend to fire at Burr, why did he fuss with his glasses? Why did he fire first, rather than hold his shot as he had suggested he would? If he had deliberately fired over Burr's head, why did he not seem to recollect that he had fired at all? When Hamilton's supporters posthumously published his vow not to fire on his opponent, Burr's supporters complained that it made Burr appear cold-bloodedly homicidal, when, in fact, he had no way of knowing Hamilton's intentions.

The duel ended Burr's political prospects as surely as it ended Hamilton's life. Beyond that, the public indignation that it aroused contributed to the demise of dueling in the Northeast.

The Wogdons remained with the Church family for generations. In 1930 Church's great granddaughter sold them to the Chase Manhattan Bank, which still holds them.[8]

They are known to have been used on three occasions: the Hamilton-Burr duel, the duel between Philip Hamilton and Eacker, and the Church-Burr duel. For Burr, who on two occasions had come out unscathed from under their muzzles, they had proven lucky. For the Hamiltons, not luckly at all.

NOTES

1. Joanne Freeman, "Dueling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel," *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (April 1996): 294–295.
2. For a detailed account of this duel, see Don Seitz, *Famous American Duels*, 70.
3. Alexander Hamilton, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* vol. 26 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977): 278–279.
4. Ibid., 280.
5. Ibid., 280.
6. Ibid., 295–296.

7. Under the British Code of Honor published in 1829, this would be a violation: "Rule 43. No gentleman should be permitted to wear spectacles, or an eyeglass on the ground, but as habitually uses them in the public streets."
8. During America's bicentennial, the pistols were disassembled in order to make exact reproductions for collectors. Merrill Lindsay, the firearms expert supervising the project, wrote a widely quoted exposé for *Smithsonian* "revealing" that the Wogdons were equipped with set triggers, though this fact was evident in contemporary accounts. Lindsay suggested that Burr probably didn't know this and that Hamilton intended to use it to his advantage, only he accidentally discharged his pistol prematurely. This contention seems unconvincing, since set triggers were a common feature of dueling pistols with which an experienced hand like Burr would have been familiar. Lindsay also claimed that the fact that the pistols were larger than .50 caliber was a violation of the code, but this author has found no such stricture in any of the written codes he has examined. See Merrill Lindsay, "Pistols Shed Light on Famed Duel," *Smithsonian* 7 (November 1976): 94–98.

   Furthermore, Lindsay assumed, as do most historians, that Burr used one of the Wogdons that Hamilton had brought with him to the ground. As has been discussed, this cannot be taken for granted. The terms of the duel specifically mention that the pistols be smoothbores and of like barrel length, which suggests that both parties were expected to provide their own.

29

CAPT. JOHN SWINEY VS. CAPT. THOMAS CORBETT

SEPTEMBER 20, 1804

Duels were usually halted after two exchanges, at most three, making an 1804 duel between John Swiney and Thomas Corbett one of the most bloodthirsty on record. It was not concluded before seven exchanges of fire.

Captains Swiney and Corbett, both of Cork County, were attached to the Irish Legion, an expatriate regiment formed in 1803 by Napoleon to accompany his planned invasion of Ireland. In a ceremony at which officers of the Legion were asked to swear allegiance to the French emperor, Swiney expressed reservations until he was persuaded that Napoleon represented Ireland's best chance for liberation. As a result of Swiney's hesitation, Corbett later refused to sign a document stating that the oath had been taken unanimously. Swiney demanded an explanation, and when Corbett haughtily refused to provide one, Swiney knocked him to the ground with his fist. The two men were quickly separated and put under arrest. Corbett was determined to avenge himself, and as soon as they were freed he set about finding a second. This was not an easy task, because most of the other officers were reluctant to get involved in the affair, especially since Corbett was not particularly well liked. At last Capt. Hugh Ware consented to deliver his challenge. Swiney accepted it, appointing as his second Captain J.S. MacNeven. Pistols were chosen as the weapons, and each man brought his own set. Swiney owned what was described as "an excellent pair," while Corbett's were said to be good, though they shot low.

The official report of the duel, filed in the French military archives, reads as follows:

> On the 3rd Complementary Day (20 September 1804) at 4:30 in the afternoon, Captain Ware delivered to Captain Swiney a challenge to duel with Captain Thomas Corbett.
>
> Captain Ware proposed to Captain MacNeven, who was to act as second to Captain Swiney, to appoint the distance at which they would fire: it was fixed at ten paces.
>
> It was decided by draw that Capt. MacNeven would give the signal, which was *one, two, three,* the first as a word of warning, the second to aim and the third to fire. On the first discharge, Capt. Corbett was slightly wounded. The second had no result.
>
> Then Capt. Swiney asked Capt. Corbett to settle the quarrel at the sword point, saying that, even though Corbett had fired two pistol shots he none the less considered him a despicable informer. Capt. Corbett refused to draw his sword and Capt. Ware insisted that the duel continue with pistols, in view of the fact that Capt. Corbett would not draw his sword.
>
> At this stage, Capt. MacNeven stated that it was repugnant to him to continue to give the signal to friends to kill themselves, and that if they decided to persevere he would propose to give each one of the duelists loaded pistols and to let them finish this fight

to death themselves without intervention of the seconds. Capt. Ware refused this proposition and they continued the duel, each one receiving a loaded pistol and firing at the given signal as before.

On the word "two," the signal to aim, Capt. Corbett fired which was contrary to the conditions. To compensate for this fault Capt. Ware invited Capt. Swiney to fire, which the latter refused to do, at the same time inviting Capt. Corbett to get a loaded pistol, and then they fired both at the same time on the agreed signal.

A second time Capt. Corbett violated the stipulated conditions in the same way, while Capt. Swiney behaved a second time as before.

At this point Capt. Ware suggested that the distance be reduced to six paces instead of ten and that the signal *one, two, three* be changed to the words, "aim," "fire," which was granted, it being remarked that no one would object to any proposition which he would make, and that he had only to measure the distance as he saw fit.

The duel was then continued with these modifications, and Capt. Swiney was wounded in the leg.

This did not satisfy Capt. Corbett who still insisted that they should continue. In the following exchange of shots, Capt. Corbett was again wounded, but nevertheless he insisted on firing again, stating that he was not "hors du combat."

In this, he was obeyed. The duel continued and this time he was put out of action.

Thus it was this unfortunate affair ended in which Capt. Swiney did only what was requested of him.

(signed) J.S. MacNeven.

I agree to all the contents of this report with the exception of the seventh paragraph which says "*a second time* Capt. Corbett violated the stipulated conditions."

I declare in addition that Capt. Corbett acted in this manner by mistake, saying that the words *one, two, three* had confused him.

(signed) Hugh Ware.[1]

Thomas Corbett was mortally wounded and died the night of the duel. Though dangerously wounded, John Swiney recovered. The duel caused considerable ill feeling within the ranks of the legion, and Adj. Gen. Bernard MacSheehy was relieved of his command for having allowed it.

Swiney resigned from the regiment in June 1805. He died at age 66 in 1842.

NOTE

1. Seán Ó Coindealbháin, "John Swiney, the Cork United Irishman: His Duel with Thomas Corbett," *Cork Historical and Archaeological Journal* 60, 2nd series (1955): 22–27.

30

THOMAS MOORE VS. FRANCIS JEFFREY

AUGUST 11, 1806

Born the son of a grocer in Dublin in 1779, Thomas Moore became one of Ireland's greatest poets, who in his day was rated on a par with Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott.

Upon its publication in 1806, his *Epistles, Odes and Other Poems* was scathingly reviewed in the *Edinburgh Review* by Francis Jeffrey, who was a stranger to Moore. Jeffrey wrote that it seemed to be Moore's aim "to impose corruption upon his readers, by concealing it under the mask of refinement; to reconcile them imperceptibly to the most vile and vulgar sensuality, by blending its language with that of exalted feeling and tender emotion; and to steal impurity into their hearts, by gently perverting the most simple and generous of their affections." He described Moore as "a public menace." Moore's anger built slowly until he decided he must challenge Jeffrey. He lined up a friend, Dr. Thomas Hume, to represent him.

> Having now secured my second, I lost no time in drawing up the challenge which he was to deliver; and as actual combat, not parley, was

my object, I took care to put it out of the power of my antagonist to explain or retract, even if he was so disposed. Of the short note which I sent, the few first lines have long escaped my memory, but after adverting to some assertion contained in the article, accusing me, if I recollect right, of a deliberate intention to corrupt the minds of my readers, I thus proceeded: "To this I beg leave to answer, You are a liar—yes, sir, a liar—and I choose to adopt this harsh and vulgar mode of defiance in order to prevent at once all equivocation between us, and to compel you to adopt for your own satisfaction, that alternative which you might otherwise have hesitated in affording to mine."

There was of course but one kind of answer to be given to such a cartel. Hume had been referred by Jeffrey to his friend Mr. [Francis] Horner, and the meeting was fixed for the following morning at Chalk Farm. Our great difficulty now was where to procure a case of pistols; for Hume, though he had been once, I think, engaged in mortal affray, was possessed of no such implements; and as for *me,* I had once nearly blown off my thumb by discharging an over-loaded pistol, and that was the whole, I believe, of my previous acquaintance with firearms. William Spencer being the only one of all my friends whom I thought likely to furnish me with these *sine-qua-nons,* I hastened to confide to him my wants, and request his assistance on this point. He told me if I would come to him in the evening, he would have the pistols ready for me.

I forget where I dined, but I know it was not in company, as Hume had left to me the task of providing powder and bullets, which I bought, in the course of the evening, at some shop in Bond Street, and in such large quantities, I remember, as would have done for a score of duels. I then hastened to Spencer, who, in praising the pistols, as he gave them to me, said, "They are but too good." I then joined Hume who was waiting for me in a hackney coach, and proceeded to my lodgings. We had agreed that for every reason, both of convenience and avoidance of suspicion, it would be most prudent for me not to sleep at home; and as Hume was not the man, either then or at any other part of his life, to be able to furnish a friend with an extra pair of clean sheets, I quietly (having let myself in by my key, it being then between twelve and one at night) took the sheets off my own bed, and, huddling them up as well as I could, took them away with us in the coach to Hume's.

I must have slept pretty well; for Hume, I remember, had to wake me in the morning, and the chaise being in readiness, we set off for Chalk Farm. Hume had also taken the precaution of providing a surgeon to be within call. On reaching the ground we found Jeffrey and his party already arrived. I say his "party," for although Horner only was with him, there were, as we afterwards found, two or three of his attached friends (and no man, I believe, could ever boast of a greater number) who, in their anxiety for his safety, had accompanied him, and were hovering about the spot. And then was it that, for the first time . . . Jeffrey and I met face to face. He was standing with the bag which contained the pistols in his hand, while Horner was looking anxiously around.

It was agreed that the spot where we found them, which was screened on one side by large trees, would be as good for our purpose as any we could select; and Horner, after expressing some anxiety respecting some men whom he had seen suspiciously hovering about, but who now appeared to have departed, retired with

Hume behind the trees, for the purpose of loading the pistols, leaving Jeffrey and myself together.

All this had occupied but a very few minutes. We, of course, had bowed to each other on meeting; but the first words I recollect to have passed between us was Jeffrey's saying, on our being left together, "What a beautiful morning it is!"

"Yes," I answered with a slight smile, "a morning made for better purposes"; to which his only response was a sort of assenting sigh.

As our assistants were not, any more than ourselves, very expert at warlike matters, they were rather slow in their proceedings; and as Jeffrey and I walked up and down together, we came once in sight of their operations: upon which I related to him, as rather *à propos* to the purpose, what Billy Egan, the Irish barrister, once said, when, as he was sauntering about in like manner while the pistols were loading, his antagonist, a fiery little fellow, called out to him angrily to keep his ground. "Don't make yourself unaisy, my dear fellow," said Egan; "sure, isn't it bad enough to take the dose, without being by at the mixing up?"

Jeffrey had scarcely time to smile at this story, when our two friends, issuing from behind the trees, placed us at our respective posts (the distance, I suppose, having been previously measured by them), and put the pistols into our hands. They then retired to a little distance; the pistols were on both sides raised; and we waited but the signal to fire, when some police-officers, whose approach none of us had noticed, and who were within a second of being too late, rushed out from a hedge behind Jeffrey; and one of them, striking at Jeffrey's pistol with his staff, knocked it to some distance into the field, while

> another running over to me, took possession also of mine. We were then replaced in our respective carriages, and conveyed, crest-fallen, to Bow Street."[1]

It was Spencer, from whom Moore had borrowed the pistols, who had let slip the news of the duel.

At the Bow Street station, the police asked the principals and seconds if they minded being put into the same room. Since they expressed no objection, they spent some time together waiting for their bail to be posted. Conversation drifted onto literary subjects, and Moore was delighted by Jeffrey's erudition. The two soon became fast friends.

Once his bail was paid Moore went to pick up Spencer's pistols and found he had a problem. The officers claimed that the pistol taken from Moore was properly loaded, while that taken from Jeffrey had no bullet in it.[2] Moore's second had loaded both weapons, since Jeffrey's second was inexperienced in that task, and foul play was suspected.

Moore immediately contacted Horner, Jeffrey's second, who assured the police that he had seen Hume load both pistols. Moore was cleared and the pistols returned, but in an article in the *Times*, "bullet" became "pellet," and the affair was ridiculed: "The pistol of Mr. Jeffrey was not loaded with ball, and that of Mr. Moore had nothing more than a pellet of paper. So that if the police had not appeared, this alarming duel would have turned out to be a game at pop-guns."[3] Moore described his mortification in a letter to his friend Lady Barbara Donegal:

> *To Lady Donegal.*
>
> Tuesday.
>
> You will see that I am doomed inevitably to one

> day's ridicule, by the unfortunate falsehood which they have inserted in all the morning papers, about the loading of our pistols; but, of course, a contradiction will appear tomorrow, signed by our seconds, and authorised by the magistrate. This is the only mortifying *suite* that this affair could have, and Heaven knows it has given me unhappiness enough. Do not scold me, dearest Lady Donegal; if the business was to be again gone through I should feel it my duty to do it; and all the awkwardness that results from it must be attributed to the ill-judged officiousness of the persons who were sent to interrupt us. To be sure, there cannot be a fairer subject for quizzing, than an author and a critic fighting with pellets of paper. . . . Tell every one as industriously as you can the falsehood of to-day's statement, and stem, if possible, the tide of ridicule till our contradiction appears. Love to your dear sisters. Ever your attached,
>
> T.M.[4]

Unfortunately for Moore, the small correction in the *Times* the next day was little noticed, and the duel continued to be regarded as a farce. Two years later, the novice poet Lord Byron took advantage of that impression to attack Jeffrey, a critic of his work as well as Moore's, in his satirical poem "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." Unfortunately, his ridicule landed most squarely on Moore in this stanza:

Can none remember that eventful day,
That ever glorious, almost fatal fray,
When Little's leadless pistol met his eye,
And Bow-Street myrmidons stood laughing by?[5]

"Little" was a pen name under which Moore had published some erotic verses, and Byron's reference not only to his "leadless pistol," but, elsewhere, to his "evaporated" balls, was far more humiliating to Moore than Jeffrey's earlier criticism. Hoping to restore his honor once and for all, Moore sent Byron a challenge on January 1, 1810. Byron was traveling and never received the letter. When Moore wrote again, nearly two years later, his temper had cooled, and he now seemed eager to curry Byron's favor in what Byron described, with some amusement, as a "demi-hostile semi-amicable epistle."

A peacemaking dinner was arranged, and the two poets became friends. Moore was later entrusted with the writing of Byron's biography.

Moore died in 1852 and remains Ireland's national poet. In an odd final indignity, his statue was erected over Dublin's largest public urinal.

NOTES

1. Thomas Moore, *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Thomas Moore* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853) 1:201–209.
2. It might have been knocked loose by the blow from the policeman's baton. The fact that Moore bought his bullets over the counter, rather than cast them specifically for his pistols, suggests that they may not have been well fitted to the bore.
3. *Times* (London), August 12, 1806, p. 3, col. 2.
4. Moore, *Memoirs,* 209.
5. Lord Byron, "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," *The Works of Lord Byron* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1856): 31.

31

LT. BENJAMIN HEAZLE VS. LT. JOSEPH FRANCIS DELMONT

AUGUST 14, 1807

Lt. Benjamin Heazle, 28, Lt. John Sargeaunt, 26, and Lt. Joseph Francis Delmont, 22, were recruiting officers in the town of Stroud, England, during the Napoleonic Wars.

After a dinner on the afternoon of August 14, 1807, Delmont and Heazle took a walk together. They were good friends, but in the course of their stroll Delmont made a jocular remark that offended Heazle. Heazle demanded an apology, which Delmont refused to give on the principle that making apologies was unbecoming to a soldier, though later he acknowledged that "on the present occasion I meant to have done it."

Heazle demanded satisfaction, and Delmont agreed to a duel that evening.

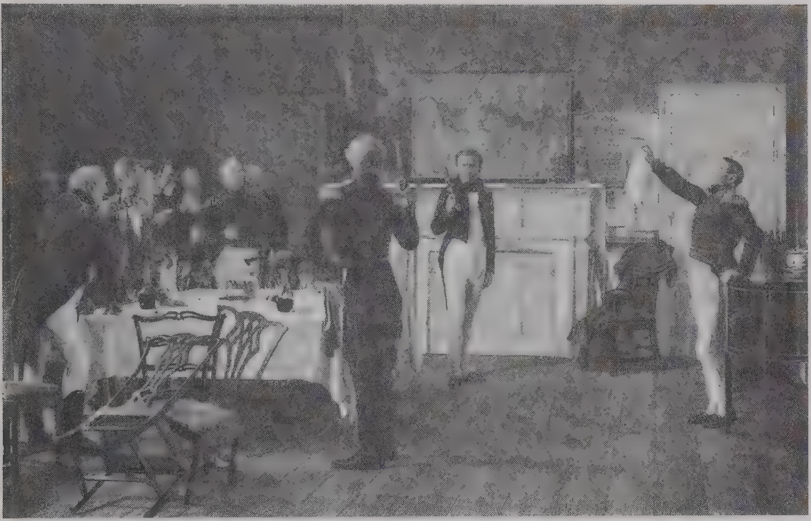
Delmont and Heazle went to the Grange, a home outside Stroud where their friend Sargeaunt was having dinner. They called him outside and asked him to serve them both as a second, warning him that if he refused they would go out in any case. After an unsuccessful effort to reconcile them, Sargeaunt consented.

The men went into Stroud to procure pistols, asking various tradespeople for the loan of a pair, with the explanation that they intended to shoot at a mark for a wager. At last they found an innkeeper, Thomas Howell, who said they could use an old horse pistol he had, which was described as "foul and rusty." Sargeaunt initially turned it down, but after failing to turn up anything better he returned and said he would use it if Howell could supply its mate, adding that the prize for the shooting contest would be dinner and wine at Howell's inn. Knowing that a local confectioner had a pistol, Howell sent his apprentice, William Hewlett, to borrow it. It was similar to the other, but cleaner and in better condition. Sargeaunt then asked for bullets. Howell's daughter fetched one from a chest of drawers in an upstairs room. Sargeaunt told her he needed more. She went off to look and returned with another, which she told him was all she could find. "I'll make these do," said Sargeaunt, and left hurriedly.

With an inkling of what was up, Hewlett tried to follow Sargeaunt but lost sight of him. Sargeaunt joined his friends, who were sitting together on a low wall, playing with a dog, as if to divert suspicion from the serious business that they had in mind, and the three men made their way to the secluded field they had selected for the duel.

George Bryant was going to mow barley when he saw the three men in an adjoining field. He peered over the intervening hedge until one of the party "asked him roughly what he wanted there, and bade him mind his own business or they would shoot him."

In about 10 minutes a shot was heard by Bryant and Hewlett and also at the nearby Grange. Heazle and Sargeaunt ran from the spot. Heazle met Mr. Sweeting, a surgeon whose presence had been requested at the duel, on the road to Stroud. Heazle told him he was coming to fetch him, for he had shot "poor Delmont." While Sweeting headed for the field Heazle continued to make his escape.



"An Impromptu Affair in the Days of the Code" by Frederick James.

Sargeaunt ran to the Grange, told the landlord what had happened, and then returned to the field. When Sweeting arrived he found Sargeaunt supporting Delmont, who lay on the ground, still alive but bleeding profusely. The ball had passed completely through his body, and on probing the wound the doctor pronounced it grave.

A large wheelbarrow, lined with cushions, was used to return Delmont to his lodgings.

On the way, he asked Sweeting, "Did I fire my pistol or not?"

Sweeting answered, "Yes, I believe you did," but Hewlett, who was helping carry him, interrupted, "No, you did not. I heard only one report."

Delmont exclaimed, "Thank God, I did not!"

After being put in his bed, Delmont sent for the local minister, who spoke with him at length and administered Communion.

Sargeaunt returned to the Grange, changed from his uniform into plain clothes, and, at nightfall, departed from his friends "with a stony look of desolation."

The surgeons who examined Delmont's wounds found that the ball had wounded his left arm before entering the left side of his chest. This surprised them, as they could not understand how it had done so unless Delmont had stood with his left side to his antagonist.

When asked whether he was left-handed, Delmont replied that he was not, adding, "I'll tell you how it was. We were placed back to back, and ordered to take six paces each, and then to [turn and] fire. The word 'fire' was not given. . . . I was shot in the act of turning round; I forgive him, and may God also forgive him."

Delmont had evidently turned the long way around, counterclockwise.

He expressed his wish that Heazle not be punished, as well as his great concern about the effect of the news on his parents, who had already lost his elder brother in a duel.

On Sunday, August 16, Sargeaunt appeared at the house of Lieutenant Delmont's father in Westminster, introducing himself by saying, "I am the most distressed man in the world; I am a military officer and shall lose my commission; I am without any pecuniary resources."

When Delmont's father asked him the cause of his distress, he replied, "Sir, you have a son in the army. He has been engaged in an unfortunate duel, in which I was the second, and the only second." Asked whether he couldn't have accommodated matters, Sargeaunt said he had done all that he could. He left the house, promising to come again, but in fact he sailed to America.

Delmont lingered for several days. The wall of his room was decorated with the famous print of General Wolfe's death beneath the battlements of Quebec City, prompting Delmont to observe, "I shall not die on a bed of honor, as he did. I was not prepared to receive the shot of my adversary—I had not turned around."

Contemporary medicine could not do much, but Delmont's nurse did not help matters when she accidentally gave him an oral dose of a lotion that was intended for bathing wounds. He died on August 18, his father arriving a few hours too late to see him alive. At his funeral service, the Rev. John Williams gave a sermon on the perniciousness of dueling, drawing from Romans 12:19, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but give place unto wrath: for it is written, *Vengeance is mine; I will repay, sayeth the Lord.*"

The coroner's inquest gave a verdict of willful murder against Heazle and Sargeaunt, but neither was ever brought to justice. Heazle had made his way to the West Indies, where he died shortly thereafter, while Sargeaunt spent his life in self-imposed exile in America, returning only once, in secret, for a brief visit to his aging father. He died a few years later as friends were preparing a case for his pardon.

32

DUEL WITH ONE PISTOL

OCTOBER 10, 1812

An odd variant of the duel by alternate fire was one in which, for lack of a pair, the opponents took turns firing a single pistol at each other. The following account in the *Times* (London) dates from 1812:

> On Tuesday, the 20th ult., there was buried at Leek M. Le Courbe, a French naval officer who was on parole at that place. The circumstances that led to the death of this young man are truly uncommon. About ten days previous to his decease, he was out beyond the hour when prisoners ought to return to their lodgings, and on this account the boys collected about and pelted him with stones. His behaviour on this occasion made one of his brother officers observe, "that he was soft,—that he would faint at the sight of his own blood." Le Courbe gave him the lie, the other struck him, and the consequence was a challenge. Each party had a second; but as they could only procure one pistol, they cast lots who

> should have the first fire. It fell on Le Courbe. Ten yards was the distance measured out by the seconds. Le Courbe fired; and his ball went through both the thighs of his antagonist, who fell on the ground declaring that as Le Courbe had now got satisfaction, he [Le Courbe's antagonist] should not take his chance. The seconds, however, insisted on his firing, and helping him up and supporting him, he, in this shocking situation (the blood streaming from his wounds), took his fire and his ball went through Le Courbe's neck. Le Courbe died on the 17th; and on the 20th, a Coroner's inquest was held on the body, and strange as it may appear, the Jury brought in their verdict—*Died by the visitation of God!* The Officer who was wounded in the thighs is recovering.[1]

Le Courbe's death being ruled an act of God was not as extraordinary as it sounds. Dueling deaths in the military were often swept under the rug; in such situations British officers were routinely listed as having "succumbed to the cholera."[2] In Le Courbe's case, death was officially attributed to typhus, and the wound in his neck explained as an incision made for therapeutic bleeding.

NOTES

1. *Times* (London), November 6, 1812, p. 3, col. 5.
2. William Douglas, *Duelling Days in the Army* (London: Ward and Downey, 1887): 21, 31.

33

THE DUELS OF VINCENT NOLTE

1813

Perhaps it was due to the wealth and idleness of its planter class; perhaps to the violence inherent in a slave society; perhaps to its fractious amalgam of French, Spanish, and Anglo cultures; or perhaps it was simply the heat and humidity. Whatever the cause, New Orleans was the unrivaled capital of dueling in the South. One observer sardonically claimed that, had Cain killed Abel in that city, “Public Opinion would have clapped [him] on the back and called him a high-spirited, chivalrous young fellow, a worthy son of one of our first families.”

One prominent resident who left a detailed account of his duels was Vincent Nolte, a French businessman who settled there in 1806 and formed a banking partnership with William Nott. In mid-1813, when the two publicly criticized the ethics of Joseph Saul, the cashier of the Bank of New Orleans, Saul threatened to chastise them both in return. Nolte was in favor of ignoring the threat, but Nott insisted on addressing it. He wrote Saul a note demanding that he either “declare the story respecting the threatened chastisement untrue, or to hold himself in readiness to give him personal satisfaction.” Nott then asked Nolte to deliver it.

Nolte found Saul on the street and handed him the note. Saul read through it calmly enough, but when Nolte insisted that he give him a written reply, he responded by punching him in the eye. Nolte, who had recently broken his right elbow and was unable to defend himself, tried to run away, but Saul chased him, grabbed him by the collar, jerked him backward to the ground, and beat his head against the curb until he lost consciousness. Nolte was discovered by friends, who took him home and laid him in his bed.

In his autobiography, he gave an account of what happened next:

> Nott called to see me at once, and remarked that he knew what was reserved for him to do, and that he hoped, in the course of the next morning, to bring me some gratifying news of my assassin, as he called him. About 10 o'clock on the ensuing day he came into my room, with the words: "Your assassin, Mr. Nolte, is weltering in his blood!"
>
> "What!" I exclaimed, "dead?"
>
> "No!" he answered, "not dead, but shot through the body!"
>
> And here he went on to tell me, that the moment he heard of the treatment I had received, he sent Saul a challenge to meet him the next morning, with pistols, and at the same time declaring that the whole business must be done within twelve hours. Saul had agreed to meet him at 8 o'clock, and I now knew the result. It appeared, upon examination, that Saul's wound would have been mortal had he not, contrary to all the rules of the *duello*, wrapped a silk bandage around his body; Nott's bullet had struck him, but its force was broken by the band of silk, which was ten yards in length, and wrapped several times about Saul's person, and glanced aside, lodging beneath one of his right ribs.

> A fortnight afterwards I was well, and did not delay 24 hours in demanding personal satisfaction from Mr. Saul for the maltreatment he had inflicted on me. His reply was that "he had already given Mr. Nott personal satisfaction for what had occurred between him and me, and that he was not bound to render account to anyone else."[1]

Nolte wrote Saul that that was unacceptable; the insult suffered by him could not be redeemed by Nott. He waited three days for an answer, but none was forthcoming. He then had cards made up, reprinting Saul's letter and his own over the words, "I do, therefore, hereby declare JOSEPH SAUL to be A WORTHLESS RASCAL and A COWARD!"

These cards were posted on all the public places and street corners of New Orleans and soon were the talk of the town. Still, Saul refused to fight.

Nolte then came up with an ingenious plan. He wrote a letter and had it published in a local paper, purporting to be from Gen. William Hull. The infamous Hull had surrendered to the British in the Revolutionary War, been declared a poltroon and a coward in his court martial, and dismissed from the army. Nolte's letter had him asking "if it were true, as he had learned, that Joseph Saul, cashier of the Orleans Bank, was about to resign his place and retire, he would be glad to fill the vacancy, as he had been told that, in spite of the disgraceful reputation of being a cowardly knave, a man could carry on business with the greatest boldness [there]."

Nolte's plan went awry when Saul located a nephew of General Hull named Allen, an army officer who happened to be in New Orleans on regimental business. Prodded by Saul, Allen demanded personal satisfaction of Nolte for having insulted his relative. Nolte accepted. It was agreed that the duel would take place at 7 o'clock the next morning, with pistols at 10 paces. The night before, Allen had second thoughts and tried to resolve the matter peaceably, but Nolte declined, as he had already accepted Allen's challenge.

He described the duel:

> The next morning, I met my antagonist, whom I had never before seen, at the appointed rendezvous. He was accompanied by Captain Perry and Dr. Hermann, a German, employed as a surgeon in the American army. My medical attendant was a Frenchman named Gros, now a resident at Tarbes, among the Pyrenees. At the first fire, the barrel of my adversary's pistol was struck by my ball, and fell broken to the ground.
>
> Before the second, I was asked by Captain Perry if I had anything to say; I, of course, replied in the negative, adding that I should remain in my present attitude until parties declared themselves satisfied. The bullets crossed without effect.
>
> At the third fire, when my ball grazed my adversary's right shoulder, and glanced past the back of his skull, he exclaimed: "By God! that seems enough!" Our seconds then had a brief consultation together, and at length announced to me that Mr. Allen would approach me unarmed, and with outstretched hand, and that if I would then step forward to meet him in the same way, and declare that in the letter I had got the *Ami des Lois* to publish, I had not meant to insult the family of General Hull, the affair would be at an end. I consented to this, and the next day my disclaimer to this effect, appeared in the *Ami des Lois* with the addition, *that the real object of that letter had been no other than to lash* Mr. Joseph Saul *with the scourge of ridicule, for his pitiful cowardice.*[2]

Saul was incensed. According to Nolte, revenge was "his only thought by day, it was his nightmare." Still, he would not face Nolte. Instead, he began training his oldest son to shoot, so that he might serve as his champion. In April 1815, shortly before Nolte was scheduled to set sail back to France, the son sneaked up behind him on a public street, spat upon him, and ran away. "You could not prove yourself the true son of your father but by attacking me from behind!" shouted Nolte after him.

Nolte was more angry at Saul than the son, whom he considered crazy. Still, there was nothing to do but challenge the young man. As he wrote:

> I [was] determined to sell my life as dearly as possible. The inflexibility of my right arm, because of the elbow having been broken, gave too great an advantage to my opponent in a long distance. I wished, therefore, to fight at five paces. . . . The challenge was accepted, but the distance was protested against, and ten paces insisted upon. Finally, after much debate, seven paces was agreed upon. The first toss, for position, was won by my adversary's second. . . . The next was equally against me, and gave him the word, which was to be "one, two, three."
>
> I have said that my elbow had been broken. This prevented me from holding my arm straight [down]. My adversary's second declared that all the advantage was on my side; beside, I could not help holding the mouth of the pistol a little elevated, and he insisted that his principal should do the same. Accordingly, he placed his arm in that position, the word was given, we fired, and he shot me in the left leg. I lost my shot, and, from loss of blood, fell. I was carried home and confined to bed for fourteen days.[3]

Nolte had to be carried to the ship on which he had booked passage to France, his craving for satisfaction from Saul to remain forever unassuaged. "To give a correct idea of the manners in New Orleans," he concluded, "is my reason for having given the history of a duel, itself so uninteresting. I yield it now to oblivion, as one of my saddest and most fruitless experiences."

NOTES

1. Vincent Nolte, *The Memoirs of Vincent Nolte; or, Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres* (New York: G. Howard Watt, 1934): 192–193.
2. Ibid., 197.
3. Ibid., 243.

34

COL. WILLIAM CUMMING VS. REP. GEORGE MCDUFFIE

JUNE 8, SEPTEMBER 2, OCTOBER 21, AND NOVEMBER 30, 1822

Between June and November 1822, four well-publicized duels were fought between two prominent Southerners, Col. William Cumming, a hero of the War of 1812, and Rep. George McDuffie, a congressman from South Carolina. Cumming supported William Crawford for president, while McDuffie supported John Calhoun, and their political differences quickly became personal. In a series of vitriolic letters to the editor and privately printed handbills, McDuffie accused Cumming of being one of "the humble instruments of a certain great magician [Crawford]," while Cumming described McDuffie as a "puppy" and a "vapouring swaggerer" who was "out-heroding Herod."

On June 2, 1822, Cumming challenged McDuffie, and the two agreed to meet at 8 A.M. on June 8. Friends attempted to arrange a peaceful settlement. McDuffie was disposed toward mediation, but Cumming, confident in his superior shooting ability, refused. Tuckaseeking, on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River, was selected as the meeting place.

During the negotiation of terms Cumming suggested that the men fight in shirtsleeves or "round jackets," but McDuffie insisted that they also be allowed to wear a frock or surtout coat.

Cumming, who arrived wearing cotton and linen, was surprised to see McDuffie in silk pantaloons and a silk-lined frock coat. Cumming's second objected that the outfit seemed "calculated to repel or divert a bullet," but McDuffie refused to change it.

At the command to fire, McDuffie jerked up his pistol and fired prematurely, his bullet striking the ground about four paces in front of him. Under the terms of the code duello he now had to stand and await Cumming's shot. Cumming took careful aim, but at the precise moment that he pulled the trigger, McDuffie, with a perhaps involuntary flinch, turned slightly away. Cumming's bullet struck him in the back, three inches to the right of his spine. He let out a shriek and fell to the ground. After examining him the surgeons decided that the duel should stop.

Although the bullet could not be removed, McDuffie was not seriously injured. Only four hours after the duel he penned a note that he felt all right, and friends described him as "cheerful and strong." The *Augusta Chronicle* of June 22 attributed McDuffie's survival to the fact that "Colonel Cumming's ordinary load was light: calculated for the side, not the back; for the resistance of common drapery, not of several folds of strong silk."

There was no reconciliation between the two men. McDuffie published a handbill condemning Cumming, and on July 4, Cumming issued another challenge, which McDuffie accepted.

The date was set for September 2, the ground to be along the Saluda Turnpike on the border of North and South Carolina. McDuffie's second, Capt. B.F. Elmore, procured two houses for the gentlemen's use, one near the site and the other a considerable distance away, in Buncombe County, North Carolina. Elmore allowed Cumming his choice, and he chose the nearer. However, Elmore had neglected to tell McDuffie of this decision, and when Cumming arrived at the house he found

McDuffie already ensconced there and had to set himself up at the more remote location. Word of the impending duel reached the Buncombe County authorities, and they arrested Cumming on August 30. He was released on September 1 and ordered to leave the county. Exhausted from his weekend in jail, and warned that the duelists would be arrested if they fought in North Carolina, Cumming notified McDuffie that he couldn't meet him as planned. McDuffie, worried that Cumming might use any additional time for target practice, rescheduled the duel for September 4. Cumming responded that that was not sufficient time for him. McDuffie went to the field of honor anyway, and when Cumming did not appear, he declared that he had done all that could be expected and returned home.

When Cumming learned what McDuffie had done, he posted him as "an equivocating scoundrel and base coward." McDuffie responded with a handbill describing Cumming as a coward who "will not meet any man unless he supposes he has a decided advantage in the contest."

The war of words escalated. McDuffie claimed that at their first meeting, Cumming had taken more than the stipulated 10 paces so that he might have the advantage of shade. Furthermore, McDuffie said that, on the ground, Cumming's face was deathly pale, while he was "a ruddy man when out of danger." He also accused Cumming of "bracing his cowardly nerves with artificial stimulants," specifically opium, and suggested that his supply must have run out before the aborted meeting of September 4. In addition, he claimed he had seen Cumming rubbing something on his hands, probably eau de cologne, "such as ladies with weak nerves use to prevent fainting."

Colonel Cumming responded in a long pamphlet called *Conduct of George McDuffie*, in which he described himself as growing accustomed to McDuffie's "feeble whining." In answer to McDuffie's charges, he said he had used opium only when severely ill 10 years before and had rubbed cologne on his hands only to keep them pliable. He suggested that McDuffie might have been well advised to do the same—perhaps then his feet would have been safe from his own pistol—but he allowed as how McDuffie's "acquaintance lay among the silk dealers and not the perfumers." He suggested that McDuffie had used "a decoction of red oak bark" to harden the skin on his back, and since his supply had run low was loath "to back into a fight (according to his mode)." He mocked McDuffie's second, saying that "Captain Elmore had forfeited all claim to be trusted. . . . He has acted in a most infamous manner, totally irreconcilable with the character of a gentleman and man of honor; he has sacrificed himself for a scoundrel, who now leaves him to reap the fruits of his unprincipled subserviency."

As a result of these remarks McDuffie met Cumming a third time, on October 21, at Campbeltown, north of Augusta.

As the men stood in their positions, McDuffie's second, who had won the word of command, called out, "Are you ready?" At this, Cumming threw his right leg forward, with his knee bent, and stretched his body nearly horizontal in a lunging position. Wishing to lodge a protest, McDuffie called out, "Stop!" but his second did not hear him and gave the command, "Fire!"

When he realized his second had not heard him, McDuffie quickly assumed the same posture as Cumming, causing Cumming's ball to pass over his head.

McDuffie did not return fire, as he thought it improper to do so after he had called, "Stop!" He wanted Cumming to change his position to one more upright, but Cumming refused. Cumming wanted a second exchange, but under the circumstances McDuffie would not go on. It was decided to refer the matter to a board of honor.

The board of honor determined that the men must meet for a fourth time, which they did on November 30 at Campbeltown.

At the word "Fire!" both men fired simultaneously and missed. At the second fire, McDuffie fired quickly and missed again, but Cumming took more careful aim and hit his opponent's left arm halfway between the shoulder and the elbow, breaking it.

Satisfaction had at last been achieved.

Due to its four-act nature and the prominence of the parties involved, the duel received widespread publicity, much of it derisive. Cumming and McDuffie were lampooned as "heroes" and "redoubtable Knights of the Pistol"; one newspaper dubbed McDuffie "the silken knight." Clowns reenacted the duel in a Philadelphia circus, and an advance release promised that the pistol charges "will be calculated as neither to injure the back, the sides, or any other woundable part of the combatants."

Despite the ridicule, both men continued to play important roles in their communities. Cumming served for a while in the state legislature and later on was offered a brigadier general's commission by President Andrew Jackson, which he turned down, and a major general's commission by President James Polk, which he turned down as well. Cumming County, Georgia, is named for him.

McDuffie served in the U.S. House of Representatives until 1834, when he resigned to run successfully for governor of South Carolina. He later represented his state in the U.S. Senate. For the rest of his life, he was bothered by the bullet he had received on June 8, 1822. Working its way closer to his spine, it made him a physical wreck. In later life he grew increasingly depressed and irritable and was considered insane at the time of his death in 1851.

35

GEN. SAM HOUSTON VS. GEN. WILLIAM A. WHITE

SEPTEMBER 21, 1826

When John P. Erwin was nominated to fill the position of postmaster in Nashville in early 1826, Sam Houston, then the district's congressman, took violent exception. He wrote to President John Quincy Adams decrying Erwin as a man of poor character who reneged on debts, defrauded his creditors, and had been seen peeping into a political opponent's window late at night.

Erwin sent a challenge to Houston through Col. John Smith T (as he called himself), a Missourian. Smith attempted to deliver it through a friend of Houston's, Colonel McGregor, but the latter refused it on the basis that Smith was not a state resident. Smith rounded up another friend of Erwin's, Gen. William A. White, who then handed Erwin's note directly to Houston in front of a small crowd. White turned triumphantly to Smith and said, "Colonel, I reckon he will not deny having received it."

Although Houston had no interest in Smith, William White was another matter. A veteran of the Battle of New Orleans, White was a local lawyer and political figure who had been a thorn in Houston's side for years. Houston rounded on him, and said, "I have *not* received it. I do not know its contents. I will not open it, but will refer its contents to Colonel McGregor. But I will receive one from you, General White, with pleasure."

"I will receive one from *you*, General Houston," replied White, turning the tables.

"The saddle is on the other horse, General, and that is enough to be understood between gentlemen."

"If I call on you, there will be no shuffling, I suppose."

To which Houston replied, "Try me, sir."

White did not take Houston up on his offer for some time, and Erwin seemed content to fight the matter out in the newspapers. However, Smith wrote to Houston to demand whether it was true that he had refused his challenge merely on the grounds that he was from out of state. Houston wrote back that, while that was his reason at the time, subsequent inquiry had provided others, such as Smith's "reputed standing and character." Though he had a reputation as a duelist, Smith reacted to this by packing his bag and leaving town.

This left White to challenge Houston. "Knowing that a coward cannot live except in disgrace and infamy, I did not hesitate as to my course," he wrote a friend.

Houston accepted and chose pistols at 15 feet, the short distance a concession to White's reputedly poor marksmanship. The duel was scheduled to take place in a week's time, on September 21. It would be fought in Kentucky to avoid prosecution under Tennessee law.

Houston visited his friend and political ally Andrew Jackson at his estate, The Hermitage, where he took some target practice under the watchful eye of the veteran duelist. Jackson told him to bite on a bullet as he drew to help steady his aim. Houston spent the remainder of the week at the farm of Sanford Duncan, near the Kentucky line, and put in further practice.

Duncan had two dogs that he had named Andrew Jackson and Thomas Benton because they were always fighting. Houston noticed that the one named for Jackson usually came out on top and took this as a good omen.

Before dawn on the morning of the duel, Houston was awakened by the barking of the dog named for Jackson. Houston arose, went into the kitchen, and began molding bullets. As the first ball rolled from the mold, a cock crowed. Houston marked one side of the bullet for the crow, the other for the dog, and resolved to use it for his first fire. He said afterward that while he was not superstitious, he took these two incidents as assurances of victory, and he later adopted the image of a dog and a rooster as his personal emblem.

He dressed in a ruffled shirt, satin vest, hunting jacket, and broad-brimmed beaver hat. Around his waist he wore a brilliant scarlet sash, decorated with elaborate beadwork and secured with a huge silver buckle. He and Colonel McGregor each downed a shot of Tennessee whiskey and set out.

At sunup the adversaries met in a pasture about six miles south of Franklin, just across the state line in Kentucky. The distance was paced off, and the principals took their places.

On the command, White fired and missed, but Houston's bullet struck home, hitting him in the groin. White slumped to the ground. His surgeon drew a silk handkerchief through the wound channel to clean it. White weakly summoned Houston as he was leaving and said, "General, you have killed me."

"I am very sorry," Houston replied, "but you know it was forced upon me."

"I know it, and I forgive you," said White, who, after four months in bed, recovered fully.

A grand jury in Kentucky indicted Houston for assault, but no attempt was made to arrest him. Shortly thereafter, when Houston was introduced before a political gathering in Tennessee, the speaker made an admiring allusion to his duel. Houston silenced the applause, explaining that he was morally opposed to dueling and didn't want to be honored for it. He concluded with, "Thank God my opponent was injured no worse."

Houston declined to duel again; his reputation was such that he could afford to. Asked why he refused to face one particular challenger, he explained, "I never fought downhill and never will; if I am to risk my life I must, at least, *make character*."

When challenged by another associate, Houston protested, "Why, I thought you were a friend."

The man answered, "So I was, but I don't propose to be abused by you or anyone else."

"Well, I should like to know, if a man can't abuse his friends, who in hell can he abuse?" Houston inquired, bringing an end to the matter.

During a period when he received an unusual number of challenges, Houston is said to have tossed one to his secretary and ordered, "Endorse in 'Number 24' and file it. Angry gentlemen must wait their turn."

36

ROBERT TRIPLETT VS. PHILIP THOMPSON

FEBRUARY 10, 1829

Philip Thompson saw active service in the War of 1812 and afterward became a successful lawyer in Kentucky. He was slight of build, with a limp and a tendency to stammer. Robert Triplett, born in 1796, was also a Kentucky lawyer, and he faced Thompson frequently in court. Since they were neighbors, Triplett tried to keep up a good relationship, but he claimed it was difficult due to Thompson's hot temper.

In February 1829, after a hearing in which Triplett felt that his witnesses had been treated harshly by Thompson, he took him aside and, in a friendly fashion, told him that he wished to maintain their good relationship, but toward that end more courtesy would be necessary on Thompson's part. Taking this as a threat, Thompson said he would not be intimidated by any man. Triplett explained that he had intended not to threaten, but to preclude any future problems between them; however, if it was Thompson's intention to seek a quarrel, he would be gratified.

Six months later, during another case, Triplett thought he heard Thompson accuse him of "stratagem." Thompson explained he had used the term in reference to another lawyer, which satisfied Triplett. Then Thompson added, "But I am always responsible for what I say."

Triplett replied, "Your explanation was satisfactory, and under that explanation there is no need for you to hold yourself accountable; there is nothing to be accounted for. Let me beg of you now to let this matter drop."

To which Thompson responded, "I withdraw my explanation."

Triplett described what followed:

> I walked up to him with a view to make a personal attack upon him, when my brother cried out, "Good God! Robert, you are not going to strike a lame man!"
>
> I halted, and looked at [Thompson] and said, "I will not strike you, sir, nor will I challenge you, abhorring duelling as I do, but nevertheless I will accept a challenge from you, and that you may not be without provocation for one, I tell you that I only now spare you in consideration of your lameness. Now challenge me if you dare."
>
> Our friends jumped in between us, several taking hold of him, and several hold of me. To those who attempted to hold me, I remarked in the language of a man of whom I had read, "One man can hold me; the balance of you go and hold Mr. Thompson."
>
> In due time the challenge came, and was accepted, to fight as soon as I could provide myself with arms. I sent to Hardinsburg for a pair of pistols, said to be the best known. But Thompson had been there before me. One friend then jumped on a steamboat and went to Louisville, where he found a fine pair belonging to Mr. J.D.B. Another went to New Madrid, where he knew there was a pair that Burr had had on the field with Hamilton. Both pairs were

obtained, and so good were they that I did not regret failure to obtain those in Hardinsburg. I now fixed the day for the fight, accepting [terms] at ten paces back to back, whirl and fire between the words, "fire" and "three," the second to count deliberately one, two, three. Thompson objected to standing back to back, as he was lame and could not turn as quickly as I could. I then waived that condition and agreed to stand face to face. He having the advantage of me in practice, I took time to make myself even with him, and soon found that I was a first-rate marksman, and heard that he was the same. The victory then would fall to him who could shoot quickest; therefore my efforts were to learn to shoot quick. During the interim before fighting I was daily engaged with B. in settling up our business,[1] and the evening before in making the final arrangements. B. remarked, it was strange to see a man writing his will, and making such arrangements while yet in good health.

The next day we were to meet at a designated point on the Indiana shore at eleven o'clock. When about to embark to cross over, Judge H., one of my seconds (each had two), asked me how I felt. I replied, "Strangely indifferent; I can hardly realize that I am going to fight a duel."

"But," said he, "you must realize it, for there is but little time left now."

I then remarked, "Before we go over, hang up a tape against that tree and let me try my hand."

He objected, saying, "If you make a bad shot it will affect your spirits."

"No," I replied, "it will not; hang it up."

It was done; at ten steps I took a shot and cut the tape about half an inch below the black spot.

"That will do," said he.

Considering the probable dreadful result, to kill or be killed, many would say it argued great want of feeling to go about such a business so calmly. But if the reader has ever been engaged in a duel, if he has had time for reflection before it occurred, and his conscience is at rest as to having used every effort to avoid it, he will then see that the thing being inevitable, and his own safety depending on his shooting his adversary, no question arises in his mind which of the two to choose. Persons may say that they would as soon be shot as to shoot an adversary. That was not my case; I very much preferred to shoot my adversary. And it was important to my success in doing so, that the awful responsibility of the act should be shut out from my mind as much as possible. I would not think of it but in one way, that it was necessary to my own safety. I had no feeling of revenge to gratify, and when I went upon the ground I had no more animosity against Thompson than against any other man on the ground. When we took our positions and were asked if we were ready, I answered, "No." I wished to see if my nerves were steady and took aim at a lump of snow on a woodpile. Although there was snow upon the ground, and it was dead of winter—February—yet I felt a warm glow and a suppleness of nerve which was extraordinary. If Providence would take part with either party in a matter like this, I should think I had his support, for never was my touch so sensitive, my flesh so pliable, nor my aim so quick and accurate as at this lump of snow. I felt as though I could put my ball just where I pleased; and unfortunately for Thompson there was a grease spot very visible just where I wished to aim.

Being satisfied with my aim, I turned to the second, who had asked if we were ready, and said, "Now I am ready."

Thompson was asked if he was ready, and answering "yes," the word "fire" was given.

Our fires were almost simultaneous, mine a little first. For a moment Thompson stood erect, and, although my aim was good, I began to think I must have missed him. But presently a black scowl came over his countenance, he threw his pistol on the ground before him and said, "I am a dead man!"

Now, all the feelings which had been strained up were relaxed, and my first impulse was to go to his aid. But as I advanced, his second, Mr. G., called to me to keep my post; that Mr. Thompson might wish another fire. I returned, but in a few moments his other second, Judge C., called out that Mr. Thompson was satisfied; he would be unable to take another fire. My ball had entered just under his right nipple, passed through his body, and lodged in his left arm without breaking the skin except where it entered. It was not supposed he could live twenty-four hours. But he did, and finally recovered; and although at first, for some time, we were not friendly, yet ultimately we made up and were good friends. And what was singular, this shot cured him of a chronic rheumatism of ten years' standing, and of his lameness. He said I was a first-rate surgeon, though rather a rough operator.

Thompson was a singular man, one of violent passions; sorry for it when the passion was over, and used to tell his friends that he could not control himself, and that he was certain he would some day be killed,—a correct prediction, for he was afterward killed in the streets of Owensboro, Kentucky, in 1863, by a man whom he had attacked. He was a man of

> fine talents and fine qualities, away from his ungovernable passions.[2]

Triplett survived Thompson by another 20 years and amassed a fortune in land speculation and shipping. He opened Kentucky's first coal mines and built a railroad. During the Mexican War he not only volunteered his services, but he lent the state $100,000 to further the war effort.

NOTES

1. Triplett owned a distillery.
2. *History of Daviess County, Kentucky* (Chicago: Inter-state Publishing Co., 1883): 87–91.

37

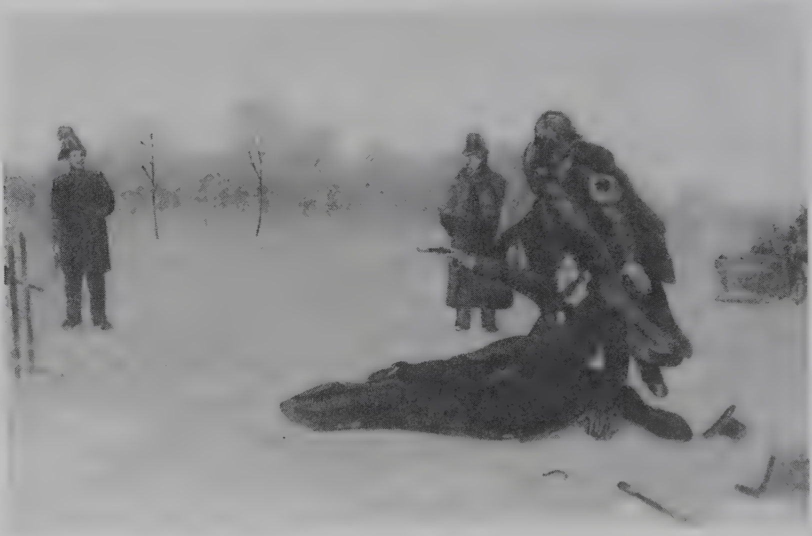
ALEXANDER PUSHKIN VS. BARON GEORGE D'ANTHÈS

JANUARY 27, 1837

> The poet in the very dawn
> Of life has perished like a flower
> That by a sudden storm was drenched;
> Alas! The altar-fire is quenched.
> —Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*

The writer and poet Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin was born in Moscow on June 6, 1799, to a family that could boast of noble lineage but little in the way of income. By age 12 Pushkin was recognized as a literary prodigy, and by his midteens his poetry was being published in prestigious journals. He was given a government sinecure in St. Petersburg, where he plunged madly into the city's high life, carousing with young aristocrats, dining at French restaurants, attending grand soirées and performances at the Imperial Theater. Tempestuous and hedonistic, he had numerous affairs and was involved in at least a dozen duels.

In 1821, while playing cards, he accused an officer on the general staff named Zubov of cheating. Zubov challenged him,



From a Russian series of postcards portraying the Pushkin-d'Anthès duel.

and the two met at the Malina dueling grounds. Pushkin brought a bag of cherries with him, from which he calmly snacked while awaiting Zubov's fire, a detail which figured in his short story *The Shot* (1830). Zubov fired and missed. Declining to fire in return, Pushkin asked, "Are you satisfied now?"

Zubov hurried over to embrace him, but Pushkin waved him off, saying, "That would be too much."

In January 1822 he fought a duel with Col. S.N. Starov, after an argument at a dance over whether the orchestra should play a mazurka or a waltz. The duel was fought at 9 A.M. in a blizzard so fierce the opponents could barely see each other. They faced off at 16 paces, and when both fired and missed, the distance was closed to 12 paces, at which both missed again. They pressed for a closer encounter, but the seconds refused and the duel was postponed. That evening, at a dinner of reconciliation, Pushkin said, "I have always respected you, which is why I accepted your cartel."

To which Starov responded, "And it is a good thing you did, Alexander Sergeyevich, for you have thereby risen in my esteem; I must acknowledge, by the way, that you stand up under bullets as well as you write."

Pushkin's aplomb against so formidable an opponent made him the talk of the town. His second, Lt. Col. Ivan Liprandi, wrote, "I have known Alexander Sergeyevich to lose control of himself, sometimes to the point of insanity; but in moments of danger, when he was facing death and, like the rest of us, showed his true self, he became utterly calm and collected. . . . When matters had reached the dueling stage, he would walk onto the field as cold as a block of ice."

Two days later Pushkin was in a local billiard room when he overheard some young men discussing his recent duel. They were unanimous in praising his courage, but they disparaged that of Starov. Enraged, Pushkin tossed his cue aside, stormed over to the group, and told them, "Gentlemen, the way in which Starov and I settled our differences concerns no one but the two of us. I warn you that if you have the audacity to criticize Starov, a man for whom I have the highest regard, I shall take your words as a personal affront for which each and every one of you will have to answer to me!"

Taken aback, the men apologized to Pushkin, who swept triumphantly from the room.

In 1831 he married the great beauty Natalya Goncharova. Shortly afterward he was given court rank—not, he suspected, on his own merits, but because the czar enjoyed the presence of his wife at palace balls. Natalya loved the attention she received in society, as well as—to Pushkin's distress—the flirtation that went on. One overly enthusiastic admirer was a handsome Frenchman in the czar's service, Baron Georges d'Anthès, adopted son of Baron Heeckeren, ambassador to the Russian court from the Netherlands. Rumors spread, and Pushkin began receiving anonymous letters suggesting that the relationship had gone beyond harmless flirtation. When Pushkin learned of a private meeting between his wife and d'Anthès, he could take it no longer. On January 25 or 26, 1837, he wrote an insulting letter to Baron Heeckeren, whom he felt had encouraged his son's infatuation. Pushkin called him a pimp and described his son as a coward and a scamp.

He received a challenge from d'Anthès by return post, identifying Vicomte d'Archiac as the second with whom his second should deal. Pushkin was reluctant to appoint someone to fill that role, because he didn't want word of the duel to leak to his friends, who would be sure to try and prevent it. On the evening of the 26th he tried to get an official at the British Embassy, Arthur C. Magenis, to act for him. Since reconciliation had already been ruled out, Magenis refused; he regarded the peaceful resolution of a conflict as the second's primary duty.

The following morning Pushkin received a letter from d'Archiac demanding that he provide the name of a second, and he responded:

> I have no desire to take the loafers of St. Petersburg into my confidence regarding my family affairs; consequently, I did not agree to any conversation between seconds. I will appear only at the place of meeting. Since it is Mr. Heeckeren [d'Anthès] who has challenged me and is offended, he can choose [a second] if he feels this necessary; I accept him in advance, even if he be one of his own lackeys. As for the hour and place, I am entirely at his service. According to Russian custom, this is sufficient. Vicomte, I beg you to believe that this is my final word and that there is nothing more for me to answer concerning this affair, and that I shall move only in order to present myself at the place of meeting.[1]

This missive must have been written in exasperation, for Pushkin knew it was unacceptable, and he got back a prompt response from d'Archiac insisting that he conform to the rules.

He remembered an old school friend, Konstantin Danzas, now a lieutenant colonel in the army, and met with him at noon. After agreeing to serve as his second, Danzas went off to make the necessary arrangements.

By early that afternoon the terms had been drawn up for a barrier duel:

1. The two adversaries shall stand at a distance of twenty paces, each being five paces behind his barrier, and the barriers being placed ten paces apart;
2. Each shall be armed with a pistol; at a given signal, they may move up to but not beyond the barrier, and fire;
3. It shall further be stipulated that once a shot has been fired, neither adversary may alter his position, so that the person who shot first shall be exposed to his opponent's fire at the same distance;
4. If both parties have fired without result, the procedure shall be repeated, with the adversaries being placed at the same distance of twenty paces and the barriers and other conditions remaining as before;
5. The seconds must be the intermediaries in any communication between the principals on the field;
6. The undersigned, witnesses invested with full powers therefore, undertake upon their honor to ensure the strict observance of the conditions set forth above, each for his principal.

January 27, 1837, 2:30 P.M.
Vicomte d'Archiac
Attaché at the French Embassy.

Konstantin Danzas
Lt. Colonel of Engineers.[2]

At his apartment, Pushkin finished up some correspondence and then bathed and dressed carefully, donning his bearskin coat before stepping into the cold. Natalya was not home. He met Danzas in a sweetshop, where they drank a lemonade. Danzas had picked up the pistols that Pushkin had selected at a gunsmith's shop. At 4 P.M. they set out in a hired sleigh for the rendezvous. On the way, they passed the sleigh of Natalya, who was returning home. Pushkin averted his face, and Natalya, who was nearsighted, did not see him, though they were only a few feet apart.

A number of people Pushkin passed recognized him and called out greetings, to which he responded in friendly fashion. The thought that he might be accompanying the great poet to his death weighed heavily on Danzas, but Pushkin maintained an eerie calm.

They saw the sleigh carrying d'Anthès and d'Archiac ahead of them, and both parties arrived at the site at about 4:30. The principals maintained a proper silence while their seconds greeted each other politely and selected a spot for the duel. It was 300 yards from the road, and concealed from it by bushes, which would serve to prevent the waiting coachmen from witnessing it. The snow was knee-deep, and the seconds trampled down a lane 20 paces long and about two feet wide. Pushkin sat hunched in his fur coat, watching the preparations. When they were finished, Danzas asked Pushkin if the ground was satisfactory.

"It is all the same to me, only hurry it," Pushkin responded impatiently.

The seconds marked off the barrier points with their greatcoats and loaded the pistols.

Pushkin and d'Anthès took their positions, weapons in hand. Danzas gave the signal to begin by waving his hat. The two adversaries advanced toward each other, Pushkin moving more rapidly, almost up to his barrier. D'Anthès had only walked four paces when Pushkin began to raise his pistol.

D'Anthès fired first. He had intended to shoot for the leg, but his bullet went high and hit Pushkin in the upper end of the thigh bone, deflecting from there into his lower abdomen. Pushkin fell, exclaiming, "I'm wounded."

He lay where he had fallen, on Danzas' greatcoat, his head as well as his unfired pistol in the snow. For a few seconds he lay motionless. Both seconds approached him, as did d'Anthès. Pushkin raised himself on his left elbow and said, "Wait, I feel strong enough to take my shot."

D'Anthès returned to his position and stood with his right side toward Pushkin, shielding his chest with his right arm. Snow had gotten into Pushkin's barrel when he fell, and Danzas replaced the pistol with another. D'Archiac was about to object, but d'Anthès signaled him not to.[3]

Pushkin, holding himself up on his left elbow, aimed carefully and fired. D'Anthès fell. "Bravo," said Pushkin, tossing his pistol aside and collapsing in a near faint. He then gathered himself and asked, "Is he dead?"

"No, but he is wounded in the chest and arm," d'Archiac replied. The bullet had passed through d'Anthès' right arm, then struck a button and glanced off, bruising his ribs. The protective placement of his arm had probably saved his life.

"It is strange," Pushkin muttered, "I thought it would give me pleasure to kill him, but I do not feel that now." When d'Archiac began to offer some words of reconciliation, Pushkin cut him off with, "In the end, it is all the same; if we both recover, we shall try again."

Pushkin, who was bleeding heavily, was placed on a litter and carried back to his sleigh. As the parties made their way slowly back to St. Petersburg they encountered a carriage that Heeckeren had ordered for such an eventuality, and Pushkin was transferred to it for his comfort. He remained conscious and in good humor, telling Danzas humorous stories about duels. However, after a story he told about a friend, Shcherbachev, who had died after being hit in the abdomen, he soberly observed, "I'm afraid my wound is the same as Shcherbachev's."

Before reaching his house Pushkin gave Danzas detailed instructions about what to say to Natalya, for he was afraid of upsetting her. Nevertheless, she fainted as soon as she saw him. He was placed on a divan in his study and examined by doctors. "When I was shot I felt a hard blow in the side and a burning pain in the loins; much blood was lost on the road—tell me frankly, how do you find the wound?" he asked. The doctors gave him almost no hope for recovery.

Pushkin ordered that Natalya be kept out of his room, because he did not want her to see him suffer, but he entertained a stream of friends. Danzas promised to avenge him. "No, no! Peace, peace," Pushkin insisted.

During the night the right side of his abdomen began to swell. Pushkin was in intense pain, sweating profusely, his eyes bulging, but he stifled his cries so as not to alarm his wife and children. At one point he ordered a servant to bring him a box from his writing desk; Danzas came in just in time to see him slipping a pistol from it under his bedclothes. Danzas took it away, and Pushkin confessed that the pain was so great he wanted to shoot himself.

The next morning he summoned his family. He blessed his children and told Natalya, "Do not reproach yourself for my death; this is a matter which concerned me alone."

Outside the apartment building, a crowd gathered in a vigil for the poet. Pushkin seemed to gain strength during the day, leading to hope he might recover.

By the morning of January 29, the crowd outside was so large that guards were brought in to keep order. Pushkin began to hallucinate. At 2:45 P.M. he spoke his last words: "Life is ended. It is difficult to breathe . . . something is crushing me."

Pushkin's novel-length poem *Eugene Onegin* was reprinted on the day of his death and thousands of copies were sold. The story of a duel between aristocrat Eugene Onegin and poet Vladimir Lensky, it contains the lines:

> "Approach!" How calm and cold their faces,
> As the two foes, with even tread,
> Not aiming yet, advance four paces,
> Four steps toward a narrow bed.
> First Eugene, still advancing duly,
> Begins to raise his pistol coolly.
> Now five steps more the pair have made,
> And Lensky, firm and unafraid,
> Screws up his eye and is preparing
> To take aim also—but just then
> Onegin fires . . . oh, hapless men,
> Such is the guerdon of your daring!
> The fatal hour is past recall;
> The poet lets his pistol fall. . . .

Though duels normally went unpunished, such was the public outcry after Pushkin's death that the government felt obliged to do something. D'Anthès was stripped of his rank, discharged from the army, and deported. Heeckeren was expelled as well. Natalya, blamed by many for her part in the tragedy, retired to the country for two years.

It seems that no famous duel is without an ironic postscript or two. Pushkin was barely in his grave when a young, unknown poet, Mikhail Lermontov, rocketed to fame with a poem that treated the duel as a politically symbolic event. The prolific Lermontov quickly became one of Russia's most innovative and influential writers. However, on July 15, 1841, the heir to Pushkin's mantle also lost his life in a duel. He was not quite 27 years old.

NOTES

1. Henri Troyat, *Pushkin* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1970): 571.
2. Ibid., 573.
3. Although Pushkin was entitled to his shot, there is some argument over whether the substitution of pistols should have been allowed.

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GEN. ALBERT SIDNEY JOHNSTON VS. GEN. FELIX HUSTON

FEBRUARY 5, 1837

Albert Sidney Johnston graduated with high honors from the class of 1826 at West Point, where he was a classmate of Jefferson Davis. In 1835, inspired by the spirit of Texan independence, he enlisted as a private in its army. Impressing his superiors not only with his devotion to duty but also "the way he sat his horse," Johnston was promoted to colonel. In late December 1836, Sam Houston, president of the Republic of Texas, appointed him senior brigadier general of his army to replace the acting commander, Brig. Gen. Felix Huston.

A charismatic leader, popular with the troops, Huston was a hot-blooded man who had fought several successful duels. He bitterly resented Johnston's appointment and would not allow it to pass unchallenged. When Johnston arrived at Camp Independence on February 4, 1837, Huston greeted him civilly enough, but later that day wrote him a letter in which he declared that Johnston's appointment was connected with "a tissue of treachery and misrepresentation," which was intended to degrade him and destroy his prospects in the Texan army, a humiliation to which he said he could not, consistent with honor, submit. He then proposed a meeting at Johnston's earliest convenience.

Johnston replied:

> SIR: I have had the honor of receiving your note of this evening. After reciprocating the sentiments of respect and esteem which you have been pleased to express toward me, it only remains to accord to you the meeting proposed. I have designated 7 o'clock, A.M., tomorrow. My friend Colonel Morehouse is authorized to make the necessary arrangements.
>
> Your most obedient servant,
> A. SIDNEY JOHNSTON.[1]

Johnston regarded his acceptance of Huston's challenge as a public duty. As he saw it, the security of the republic depended on the efficiency of the army, which depended on the discipline of the troops, which could only be secured by their obedience to their lawful commander. General Huston was undermining Johnston's moral authority to command, and therefore the interests of the country, at a time when a massive invasion from Mexico was considered imminent. Even though Johnston had scant regard for the code duello, the challenge had to be met.

It was agreed to use General Huston's horse pistols: single-shot, crook-handled weapons with 12-inch barrels and hair triggers.

Mr. Norvall, who was then in the Texan army, described the duel, writing that "Huston's unrivaled skill with the pistol was so well known that astonishment was expressed that Johnston did not choose rapiers, with which he would have had an advantage. This was probably the reason he did not choose them. The advantage he was striving for was a moral one."[2] Johnston's second, Colonel Morehouse, objected that

General Huston was familiar with, and expert in the use of, these particular pistols, while Johnston had never handled them before. But Johnston, willing to yield every advantage, waived the objection.

Accompanied by their friends, the men forded the Lavaca River on horseback and after passing through a patch of forest, met on an open, grassy spot on the edge of the prairie. There were many witnesses present, for, as Johnston's son William wrote, "the contest, though deadly in intention, was chiefly one for the moral control of these very men; and their presence was, therefore, equally desired by the antagonists." He described the duel:

> General Huston, according to the custom of practiced duelists, who wish to present as inconspicuous a mark as possible to the aim of an opponent, closely buttoned his coat as he took his position. General Johnston, on the contrary, laid aside his coat and vest, and bound his sash around his waist, thus offering his body, clad in a white shirt, as an almost certain target. When Huston perceived this, not wishing to be outdone in audacity, he somewhat angrily followed his example.
>
> General Johnston was perfectly aware of the disadvantage at which he stood, and had calmly resolved on a course of action which would lessen his disparity with his opponent. He knew he stood no chance with the weapons employed if General Huston was ever able to take aim at him. It is known, to those familiar with the use of the hair-trigger, that, if the finger is allowed to touch it, the report of another pistol will almost always produce a sufficient involuntary muscular contraction of the finger to cause a premature discharge. Availing himself of this fact, General Johnston raised his pistol quickly, and, with

> his eye on his opponent's finger, just anticipated him enough to succeed in "drawing his fire" before he could cover him with his pistol. He repeated this five times with the same result, much to Huston's discomfiture, whose reputation as a "dead-shot" was at stake. Huston declared years afterward that he did not wish to kill Johnston; but that a shot, through his hair and grazing his ear, admonished him that it was necessary in order to save himself. This is not probable, as he had the privilege at any time to express himself satisfied, and end the contest, a right not accorded to the challenged. At the sixth shot Huston's superior skill prevailed and General Johnston fell with a ball through his hip.[3]

Huston at once asked leave to approach him, expressed his regret and his willingness to serve under him, and then mounted his horse and rode back to camp with a pale, agitated face. A thousand soldiers rushed forward to congratulate him as he crossed the lines, but he waved them off and rode straight to his quarters. That afternoon, Norvall recalled, "I saw him pacing up and down in the chaparral, and looking so miserable that, even at this distant day, I cannot think of him without pity."[4]

The ball had passed through the orifices of Johnston's pelvis, not breaking the bone, but severely injuring the sciatic nerve. Johnston was moved to the little hamlet of Texana, where he lay for weeks at the brink of death. His friend and second, thinking that he was dying, muttered that he would avenge him. Johnston turned to him and said, "It is my request, in the event of my death, that you shall yield obedience to my second in command, General Huston, and I trust you will not by such conduct promote a spirit of insubordination."

President Houston and Secretary of War Col. William S. Fisher sent Johnston pro forma reprimands for fighting the duel, together with assurances of complete confidence and esteem. Houston also sent doctors to provide him with the best possible medical care.

Johnston's recovery was slow and painful, made more so by his reluctance to delegate his duties, which he continued to perform from his sickbed. He displayed no resentment toward Huston, who, in turn, treated him with the utmost respect and declared him "the coolest and the bravest man" he had ever known. Nevertheless, Huston had difficulty accepting his diminished prospects and loss of prestige, and after a time he left the army.

William Johnston recalls as a little boy asking his father "if he did not hate Felix Huston."

> He replied, "No," and then I asked him what he would do if he were to meet him then. He laughed, and answered, amusedly, "As he would be a stranger here, I would ask him to dinner."[5]

William added, "I thought a good deal about this before I could reconcile it to my sense of right."

When Texas seceded from the Union in 1861, Johnston resigned his U.S. Army commission, and Jefferson Davis appointed him the second-ranking general in the Confederate Army, in charge of the western theater. While leading his troops into battle at Shiloh he was shot in the leg, but continued to issue orders until he bled to death. His loss was regarded as a severe blow to the South.

NOTES

1. William Preston Johnston, *The Life of Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston, Embracing His Services in the Armies of the United States, the Republic of Texas, and the Confederate States* (1878; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1997): 76.

2. Ibid., 76.
3. Ibid., 77–78.
4. Ibid., 78.
5. Ibid., 79.

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REP. JOHNATHAN CILLEY VS. REP. WILLIAM GRAVES

FEBRUARY 24, 1838

The fatal duel between Rep. Jonathan Cilley, Jacksonian Democrat of Maine, and Rep. William Graves, Whig of Kentucky, was described, in a couplet popular at the time, as a "grave thing for Cilley, and a silly thing for Graves." It remains one of the most famous and controversial duels in American history, not only for the prominence of the principals and seconds involved, but because three exchanges of fire were permitted despite the fact that the two had no real reason to fight and were doing so only to satisfy a minor point of the code duello.

The trouble had arisen when Cilley had denounced an editorial by James Watson Webb on the floor of the House. Webb took personal offense and persuaded Graves to present his challenge to Cilley. Cilley refused it, telling Graves that he did not consider himself accountable for words spoken in political debate. Graves insisted that Cilley state that this was his only reason and that he did not refuse Webb's challenge on the grounds that he did not consider him a gentleman. It was Graves' impression that Cilley agreed on that point, but Cilley later refused to do so publicly. Under the code duello, Cilley had insulted Graves by refusing the challenge he bore, and Graves felt that Cilley had deceived him regarding his opinion of Webb's gentlemanly status. Graves met with Rep. Henry A. Wise of Virginia and Whig party leader Henry Clay, who advised him to challenge Cilley himself. Wise took on the duty of second, delivering Grave's challenge to Cilley's second, Rep. George W. Jones of Iowa. It was accepted, and Jones proposed the following terms:

> The weapons to be used on the occasion shall be rifles; the parties placed side by side, at eighty yards[1] distance from each other; to hold the rifles horizontally at arm's length, downwards; the rifles to be cocked and triggers set; the words to be "Gentlemen, are you ready?" After which, neither answering "No," the words shall be, in regular, succession, "Fire—one, two, three, four." Neither party shall fire before the word "fire," nor after the word "four." The positions of the parties . . . to be determined by lot. The second of the party losing the position shall have the giving of the word.[2]

Duels with long guns were frowned upon by most dueling codes, but were fairly common in the United States. Wise protested, but Clay declared that "he is a Kentuckian and can never back from a rifle." Since Graves did not own a rifle, he was lent one by Jones.

The duel was held at 3 P.M. on February 24, 1838, at the Bladensburg dueling grounds just outside the District of Columbia, notorious as the site of some 50 or so duels. Graves was seconded by Wise, Sen. John J. Crittenden, and Sen. Richard H. Menifee, all of Kentucky. In addition to Jones, Cilley was accompanied by Sen. Alexander Duncan of Ohio and Rep. Jesse Bynum of North Carolina.

In an 1875 letter to Jones, Wise wrote:

These four gentlemen were just as responsible for the whole conduct of the affair as you and I, yet you and I alone were ever assailed for the "*barbarous three exchanges of shots*." Now, you and I know that there was really but one deliberate exchange of shots; the third time, after each party, in turn—Cilley in his first shot and Graves in his second—had blundered in his fire, and they would not and could not leave the ground under the accidents which would have caused misapprehension and perhaps ridicule.

There was no difficulty, dissension or complaint between you and myself from the first to the last of the affair. All fairness and every courtesy were observed. The preliminaries were settled without a jar: you won the word and the choice of position fell to me. You fronted me halfway the line of fire, held yourself in position to be equally heard, and delivered the word aloud, distinctly and fairly as described. My eyes were turned upon Mr. Cilley to see if he observed the terms, and he fired first, nearly about the count "One," Graves last, about the word, "Two."

Mr. Cilley's ball struck the ground between your position and mine, forty steps from his stand. Graves missed him the first shot. Mr. Cilley was evidently disturbed by losing his shot and firing too quick. You ran to him and something passed which showed Mr. Cilley would make no concession without another fire.

Then, in turn, Mr. Graves lost his shot at the second exchange. He had a large, coarse hand, and no sense of touch fine enough for a hair-trigger, and no experience with firearms. My orders to him, therefore, were to hold his rifle cocked, hair-trigger set, according to terms, horizontal; at the word "Fire" to push his gun forward, so as to bring the breech firmly to his shoulder and then level the sight on the vertical, covering his antagonist's person, and to fire when he raised as high as the hip of his antagonist; and to insure deliberation and to prevent losing his shot *to keep his finger* out of the spanner [trigger-guard] until the instant of pulling the trigger. This he did the first time, and he fired plenty quick enough. But the second shot, whilst I was forty yards off my position, Mr. Menifee . . . when he put the rifle in Grave's hand, told him he fired too slow the first time and upon Graves telling him of my orders, he, Menifee, objected to it and prevailed on him to put his finger in the spanner.

The result was as I had predicted. At the word "Fire," and as he pushed his gun forward and raised the breech to his shoulder, it was discharged into the ground not three feet from his toes. With his eye fixed on Cilley, seeing no smoke and feeling no recoil, he was unconscious that his gun was fired, and raised and stood pulling at his trigger when he received Cilley's fire again about the count "Two." He stood still pulling at his trigger until the count was out. Thinking he was writhing from a wound, I ran to him and he dropped the breech of his rifle to the ground, blew in the muzzle and exclaimed: "Why, this gun is discharged!"

He and Menifee at once explained the cause. But he was very much mystified and nothing could have prevented him from demanding another exchange of shots. When you came up—as you did every time to inquire whether Graves was satisfied—you could receive but one answer: not without some disclaimer—and Graves' awkwardness caused me to give you the notice I did, so much denounced, that after the third fire I would demand a shortening of the distance.

> By the time of the third exchange of shots both were well trained, were deliberate, and Graves strictly obeyed my orders. At the count "Two," or a moment before, Mr. Cilley fired, and about an instant after "Two" Graves fired and made the vertical line shot just above the hip. Thus ended the fight.
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> Both of Cilley's last two shots were very fine; they passed through the fence logs just behind Graves, one at the elevation of his breast, the other in a line perpendicular to the first and at the elevation of the hip. If his coat had been unbuttoned both balls would have perforated his lapels. His life was saved by his position. The wind blew steadily obliquely against Mr. Cilley's ball. I was sure the aim would be at the center of Graves' body, and allowing about from four to six inches for the deflection to the left of Cilley and the right of Graves, I selected the position I did, though disadvantageous in other respects.
>
> There never was a dispute about any facts between the representatives of Graves and Cilley. Mr. Cilley fought with weapons of his own selection, and the duel was as nearly fair as any duel can be. He shot to kill; only missed his opponent's vitals by miscalculating the force of the wind; was himself killed rather by chance than by the skill of his adversary; and, as he was unquestionably a brave man and accepted that arbitrament, no reproach would ever have escaped his lips if he might have spoken.[3]

Graves' shot severed Cilley's femoral artery, and he bled to death within minutes.

The duel provoked an uproar, with Wise coming in for particular opprobrium. He was held largely responsible for the three exchanges and for suggesting, after the second, that the distance might need to be shortened. A Boston newspaper vilified him as "a disgrace to humanity" and expressed its hope "that the penitentiary or gallows will soon relieve society of his baneful presence." After a Congressional investigation, Wise and Jones were censured and Graves was expelled.

Henry A. Wise was well known as a duelist and a second in duels. His son John S. Wise described his views on the subject in an article for the *Saturday Evening Post*:

> It was idle talk with him about the consequences of dueling—the death or wounds of the principals, the vicarious sufferings entailed upon their families in consequence. To all such suggestions he would reply that in urging these you were sacrificing a high principle to the arguments of inconvenience; that of course dueling was dangerous; and that if it was not it would not make men cautious about provoking a duel. He argued that its very danger was its strength, because it tended to preserve social courtesy, and that, when its utility was admitted and one began to calculate the cost, he was rapidly falling into the category of a . . . coward.
>
> He delighted to tell the story of the interview between Felix Grundy and Andrew Jackson. Grundy consulted Jackson and sought his advice whether, in a certain matter, he ought to send a man a challenge. After hearing the case, Old Hickory thundered forth: "By the eternal gods, sir, challenge him!"
>
> Grundy began to explain to General Jackson the condition of his private affairs, which made it very undesirable that he should challenge. Jackson indignantly replied: "Then, sir, if your family affairs are more important than your honor, don't challenge him!"
>
> The moral aspect of dueling did not seem to repel him at all. In fact, he looked upon the sending or accepting of a challenge to fight a duel as entirely con-

sistent with loving and serving and fearing God in other respects. The mental and moral absolution taken to himself by the duelist of that day would seem to have rested upon the notion that the right to demand respect and courtesy with absolute fearlessness, and to kill anybody who denied those inherent rights, was God-given, and that the enforcement of those rights was not offensive to the Deity. I have not the slightest idea that he thought God would punish him for the offense of dueling. Many years after his own dueling experiences I witnessed his death, and it was sublime, God-fearing, and conscience-clear.[4]

NOTES

1. After the duel it was measured at 92 yards.
2. Lorenzo Sabine, *Notes on Duels and Duelling*, 95.
3. John Wise, "The Fire-Eaters," June 2, 1906, 28.
4. Ibid., 6.

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CAPT. HENRY W. ALLEN VS. DR. R.H. MARSTELLER

JULY 6, 1844

The following account is from the memoirs of Horace Smith Fulkerson:

> I was standing one morning early in the month of July [1844], on a street of [Vicksburg] . . . in front of my place of business engaged in earnest conversation with Captain Henry W. Allen, a young lawyer of the town, about a private matter of concern to both of us, when a friend of Allen's walked up hurriedly and interrupted us with the remark, addressed to Allen, that Dr. [R.H.] Marsteller (a practicing physician of the town, who was, from previous altercations, on bad terms with Allen) was down the street and using, in the presence of others, very abusive and insulting language about him. Allen, without another word to me, whipped off in his quick, nervous way in the direction indicated by his friend, and was soon face to face with the Doctor; and drawing two pistols from his person, presented them handles

foremost to his adversary, accompanying the act with the words, energetically spoken, "take your choice, sir." (Possibly the same liberal offer would have been made the writer if *his* interview with the Captain had not been interrupted!)

Before the Doctor, who met the challenge with a look of defiance, could act or respond in words, a planter from the parish across the river, who was present, stepped between them with the remark, addressed to Allen, that a street fight was unbecoming in gentlemen, and suggested a resort to the "code." Allen, a pronounced advocate of the duello, touched and pleased at the suggestion, verbally challenged Marsteller to meet him at Coffee's Point, across the river, *within an hour.* Marsteller promptly responded with the assurance that he should be accommodated. They separated, each to get a friend and surgeon, and means of crossing the river.

They soon found their friends and means of crossing, and in less than an hour, ten or fifteen skiffs were being pulled to the opposite shore, filled with the principals and their friends, and numerous spectators. News of so exciting a scene in prospect rapidly spreads over a little town, and people with curiosity about a scene as ugly even as a duel are easily found.

When the fighting ground was reached—a grove of cottonwood and cypress, immediately on the bank of the river—Allen was greatly excited. He stripped himself to the skin as low as the waist; was very vociferous, and confident of killing his antagonist, and his countenance bore a marked expression of ferocity. Marsteller said nothing and was perfectly calm as he awaited the settlement of the preliminaries. He had only taken off his coat and loosened his shirt collar.

A few of us spectators busied ourselves at an attempt at reconciliation, but our efforts availed nothing towards a settlement. Marsteller, as the challenged party, had the choice of weapons and the naming of distance. He had procured a pair of heavy pistols—not duelling—which he chose to be filled with buckshot, and named the distance at ten *feet*—not paces. Under the apprehension that he meant paces when he said feet, he was inquired about it, but he repeated ten feet. Allen won the position and the word. It was about midday. The pistols were loaded, the distance was measured, and they took position north and south—Allen north. Knowing the nature of the loads of the pistols, there was a general movement on the part of everybody present to get out of range by moving off at right angles to the fighters, leaving the second who gave the word alone in his danger. As the writer was not the special friend of either party he very appropriately got up on the top of a fence nearby!

As they stood in position Allen held his pistol perpendicularly *down*, while Marsteller held his almost perpendicularly *up*.[1] After the second had called out "gentlemen, are you ready," intending to follow immediately with the words fire—one—two—three, Allen cried out "stop," and told the second to state again how the word was to be given—thought to have been a ruse on the part of the Captain to disconcert the Doctor, but the Doctor gently lowered his pistol when Allen called "stop," and when Allen said "go ahead" the Doctor again elevated his pistol and quietly waited for the word.

The second called out distinctly but with trembling voice: "Gentlemen, are you ready? fire! one, two, three." They fired, both of them so nearly together at the word "one" that it seemed to the bystanders to be

> but a single loud report. A great volume of smoke completely enveloped them, and we all looked on in profound silence till it rose and disclosed the two figures standing and looking savagely at each other, and each with apparent astonishment that his adversary was not prone upon the earth, and we, the spectators, equally surprised. Immediately, Marsteller began to sink slowly to the ground, and Allen turned away bloody and limping in the direction of my perch. I reached him as he sat down upon a log near by, and shall not soon forget the mingled anguish and anger of his face as he replied to my question about his wound. A single ball had passed through both thighs high up. A single ball had struck Marsteller in the hip and he lay upon the ground where he had stood.
>
> Allen's friends conveyed him to his skiff as soon as possible, and thence to his home, he himself being the bearer of the first intelligence of the fight to his wife. Marsteller, as soon as he had recovered somewhat from his first prostration, demanded another fire, and upon being told that Allen had been carried off badly wounded, insisted that he should be called back, saying, "I am not satisfied." He crossed the river to his room, probed the wound with his own instrument, and himself, unaided, extracted the ball and *never went to bed for the wound.* It would be impossible for a man to show more nerve than he did throughout the whole affair.
>
> A peace was patched up by their friends, but came near being broken on several occasions by Marsteller's lingering desire for another "shot." Allen did not shrink from another encounter, but friends would interpose and calm them down.[2]

Fulkerson described Marsteller as a modest and taciturn bachelor in his early thirties who "had been led, by his morbid sensitiveness . . . into intemperance, but it was the intemperance of a gentleman."

Allen, according to Fulkerson, was impetuous, impulsive, ambitious, proud, vain, and somewhat boastful, but generous, kindhearted, and genuinely chivalrous. At the time of this duel, he was 24 years old and had been married only four days. He served a term in the Louisiana legislature and in the Civil War commanded a regiment at Shiloh, where he was wounded. After his recovery he reassumed command of his regiment in the assault upon federal lines at Baton Rouge. Allen was seriously wounded and disabled for the rest of the war but was elected governor of Louisiana. In 1865 he happened to meet Dr. Marsteller in Nacogdoches. According to Fulkerson, "Like brave men they each forgave the past and parted for the last time on earth as friends."

NOTES

1. Such a discrepancy was explicitly forbidden under the American Code, chapter 7, rule 4, on the grounds that a man starting with his pistol pointed upward can bring it onto his target more quickly than a man starting with his pistol pointed at the ground.
2. H.S. Fulkerson, *Random Recollections of Early Days in Mississippi* (Vicksburg, MS: Vicksburg Printing and Publishing Co., 1885): 44–49.

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THOMAS RITCHIE JR. VS. JOHN HAMPDEN PLEASANTS

FEBRUARY 25, 1845

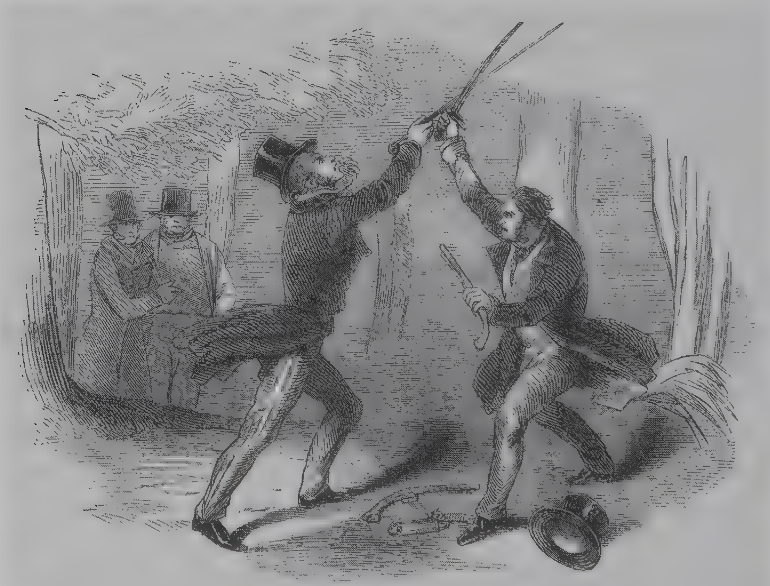
In the antebellum South, a journalist had to be able to fight as well as write. Newspaper sales thrived on controversy, editorial invective was a honed art, and strong words often led to challenges.

Born in 1778, Thomas Ritchie accepted the editorship of the newly founded Richmond *Enquirer* in 1804, a position he held for 40 years. Under his direction it became the foremost newspaper in the South, representing the Republican political views of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. “I read but a single newspaper, Ritchie’s *Enquirer*,” wrote Jefferson in 1823, “the best that has been or is published in America.”

Though Richmond was a Whig stronghold, it had no newspaper providing a counterpoint to the *Enquirer* until 1824, when John Hampden Pleasants, scion of a prominent Virginia family, established the Richmond *Whig*. Pleasants was 19 years Ritchie’s junior.

Ritchie and Pleasants clashed verbally for years, but serious trouble didn’t develop until 1843 when, in a particularly vituperative exchange, Pleasants described his 65-year-old rival as a slanderer and poltroon. This was too much for Ritchie's oldest son, William, 30, and he challenged Pleasants. A duel was arranged with shotguns, but the seconds worked out a reconciliation an hour before it was to take place. With pride, his father noted that no point of honor had been conceded and that William had earned the admiration not only of the young ladies, but of local political leaders for having "the firmness to support what he has the ability to write." Thomas Sr. decided that it was time to make full partners of his two sons, and in 1845 he left the *Enquirer* in their hands when he went to Washington to edit the *Union.*

On January 16, 1845, while William was out of town, Thomas Ritchie Jr., 25, printed an anonymous letter accusing Pleasants of being an abolitionist. Among Virginia gentlemen, this was tantamount to calling him a traitor. Pleasants demanded a retraction, pointing out that his modestly progressive views



A depiction of the Ritchie-Pleasants duel from Pictorial Times *(April 25, 1846).*

on slavery were not different from those of Thomas Ritchie Sr., but Thomas Jr. refused. There followed a heated exchange of insults on the editorial pages. Ritchie flippantly dismissed Pleasants, writing, "Enough has occurred in former [controversies] between Mr. J.H.P. and ourselves to show the utter futility of an attempt to bring them to a final decision." This pointed reference to the earlier dispute was a violation of the code and infuriated Pleasants.

In his next editorial Pleasants wrote, "Calmly reviewing this piece of impertinence, I should be of [the] opinion that this assailant meditated fight, if I could think that a young brave would seek, as an antagonist upon whom to flesh his maiden sword, a man so much older than himself as I am, and with dependent children. . . . Battle, then, being clearly not his object, I must suppose that he meant no more than a little gasconade, and the recovery, at a cheap rate, of a forfeited reputation for courage."[1]

To this, Thomas Jr. responded on February 21 that "fact within our knowledge proved [Pleasants] to be a COWARD. He appeals to the confines of age and dependent children. Let it be! We shall not disturb him."

Pleasants armed himself and prowled the streets, searching unsuccessfully for Thomas Ritchie Jr. He told a friend that "he didn't want to shoot Ritchie; he simply wanted to hit him a blow, knock him down, and show he wasn't a coward."

Friends attempted to mediate the matter, but Ritchie refused to withdraw his epithet, insisting that he believed it to be true.

The following day Pleasants sent Ritchie a note. It ignored the normal protocol, simply stating that Pleasants would be on the bank of the James River at sunrise on the following morning, armed with side arms and accompanied by two friends similarly armed.

In his response, Ritchie objected to the note on five counts:

> First, because it is not in the form which is justified by men of honor, and to a great extent upheld by public opinion. Second, because it prevents that certainty of equal advantage recognized by all gentlemen as an essential of the duel or fair and chivalrous combat. Third, because it gives to the challenging party the privilege of selecting time, place, and weapons—a right which, according to all usage, belongs to the challenged. Fourth, because both the time and the place are so selected as to occasion great inconvenience and danger to all parties concerned, from a legal prosecution. Fifth, because the terms proposed are savage, sanguinary and revolting to the taste and judgment, not only of all honorable men, but of every man in the community and calculated to cast odium on anyone who may be governed by them.[2]

"Notwithstanding these objections," Ritchie concluded, "I shall be on the ground mentioned at sunrise." The impending duel was the talk of Richmond, though, typically, it seemed to have escaped the notice of the authorities.

The morning of February 25 was raw and windy. There had been sleet during the night, and the ground was slippery. Members of the two groups arrived at different times, taking their places about 200 yards apart. Pleasants' second asked Ritchie's second to get his principal to withdraw the term "coward." The latter brusquely refused, saying, "I've already had my friend here fifteen minutes after the time appointed. I'll keep him fifteen minutes more, then take him away."

A crowd began to gather, but the preparations continued. From a box carried by a young slave, Pleasants took a revolver, which he placed in his left coat pocket; a bowie knife, which he stowed in his vest; a sword cane, which he held under his left arm; and two dueling pistols, which he took in his hands.

Ritchie carried a cutlass on his belt and a revolver in his coat pocket, as well as four dueling pistols, two in his belt and two in his hands.

The word was given, and Pleasants began walking toward Ritchie, his face a mask of intense concentration. Ritchie stood his ground. From the assembled spectators came cries of "Ritchie, wait, Ritchie!" and "Pleasants, stop!" Pleasants gave only a small dismissive shake of his head in response.

When Pleasants closed to within 30 yards, Ritchie fired and missed. Pleasants advanced to a range of 15 or 20 feet and fired back, missing; some say he fired deliberately high. From a sheltered position behind a tree, one of Ritchie's friends called to him, "Shoot him again, shoot him again!"

Ritchie seemed to need little encouragement. Bullets from his battery of pistols struck the left hand and left arm of Pleasants, who staggered under the impact but kept advancing. When he stood about six feet away from Ritchie, he said, "I came to show you I'm not a coward, and now you can see it," and fired his second pistol.

"He's got Ritchie—a dead man!" exclaimed one off the spectators as Ritchie staggered back. Ritchie had been burned by the muzzle flash but was not hit. He grabbed at Pleasants' pistol, while firing his own revolver twice, hitting Pleasants in the neck and groin. Even at this point, Pleasants was still on his feet. He beat Ritchie in the face, either with his empty weapon, sword cane, or bowie knife—precisely which was obscured by the pall of gun smoke. It was then that Ritchie received the only wound he suffered in the affray, a gash extending from his lip to his ear.

They grappled. Pleasants gave Ritchie several blows and two or three thrusts with his sword cane, and Ritchie made a few thrusts with his cutlass in return.

At this point the spectators rushed at the men to stop them. Pleasants was on his feet but tottering. Ritchie stood in front of him, eyes staring wildly, still clutching his cutlass. Someone took Pleasants' arm and eased him to a reclining position.

Covered in blood, Ritchie walked a few steps away and then ran from the scene. His carriage, waiting nearby, took him to the District of Columbia so that he might avoid arrest.

As the sun was rising, the mortally wounded Pleasants was brought home to his wife and children. He had six bullet wounds, sword cuts in his thigh and abdomen, and numerous gashes and bruises.

By noon the whole of Richmond was buzzing with news of the duel. Business nearly ground to a halt as men gathered to talk it over, and schoolchildren sobbed in their classrooms.

Pleasants lived another two days, rambling constantly about the duel. He claimed that there was no bullet in the pistol he had fired at close range and that he had never intended to kill Ritchie. The truth cannot be determined. While Pleasants did not draw the loaded revolver he had in the left-hand pocket of his coat, that may have been due to the disabling wounds on his left arm and hand. Certainly he showed no restraint in employing his sword cane, which was bent double from the force of his blows.

Richmond hung on every word of the hourly bulletins issuing from the death chamber. Pleasants described Ritchie as "a brave man" and asked where he was. Told he had left town, he said, "Tell him what I've said; it may be a relief to him. . . . He's only a rash boy, under the influence of bad advisers." Pleasants didn't want the affair to be described as a duel; "I felt under obligation not to fight a duel. . . . But I had to show him I wasn't a coward, didn't I?"

As he lay dying, Pleasants was described as a hero who could not tolerate an imputation of cowardice, a martyr to the Whig cause. No one suggested publicly that he had been rash or foolish. A line from the elegy at his funeral was inscribed on his tomb: "With a talent above genius, a courage above heroism."

The duel received extensive national coverage. Editorial opinion was largely divided along party lines; Democrats accused Pleasants of trying to murder his political rival, while Whigs said the same about Thomas Ritchie Jr. Some Southern newspapers saw in the savagery of the affair a vindication of the code duello, which was intended to prevent such unregulated butchery.

Thomas Ritchie Jr. was tried for murder in the first degree. His attorney spoke of honored tradition, listing some of the prominent figures who had resorted to the duel. He stressed that "the letter of the law is made to yield to the spirit of the times" and rested with a plea to the jury to "do justice to my unfortunate young friend. Bind up the wounds of his broken-hearted parents; carry joy and peace and consolation to his numerous family and friends; wash out the stain that has been attempted upon his character and reputation, and restore him to his country—as, in truth, he is—pure and unspotted."

The prosecution was halfhearted, and, without even leaving the box, the jury turned in a verdict of not guilty. The crowd broke out into applause, and men ran up to shake Thomas Ritchie Jr.'s hand, forcing the judge to gavel the court to order.

Thomas Ritchie Jr. died in 1854. His early death, at 35, was popularly attributed to remorse, a belief that was reinforced when it was revealed that he had left his estate of $25,000 to the children of the man he had killed.

NOTES

1. Marion Harland, *Marion Harland's Autobiography: The Story of a Long Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910): 175.
2. Harnett Kane, *Gentlemen, Swords, and Pistols* (NY: William Morrow and Co., 1951): 204–205.

42

SEN. DAVID C. BRODERICK VS. JUSTICE DAVID S. TERRY

SEPTEMBER 13, 1859

The last duel of importance in the United States was fought in California in 1859 between Sen. David C. Broderick and State Supreme Court Justice David S. Terry. Both were Democrats, but they came from bitterly divided wings of the party. Broderick was an antislavery "Douglas" Democrat (named for Sen. Stephen Douglas of Illinois), while Terry was a leader of the Southern sympathizers, the element dubbed "Chivalrists" or "Chivs."

Born in Washington, D.C., in 1820, Broderick grew up poor in the streets of New York. In 1849 he moved to California, was elected to the state senate in 1850, and in 1856 was appointed to a vacant U.S. Senate seat. Broderick found that in the rough-and-tumble world of California politics, the Southern sympathizers were inclined to seek redress in the code duello. He was accustomed to fighting with his fists rather than deadly weapons, but it was not in his nature to back down, so rather than allow himself to be intimidated he resolved to master the pistol. According to biographer James O'Meara, Broderick became one of the best marksmen in the state: "There was not a man living who could excel, if any could equal, him in the quick and accurate discharge of a pistol."

Broderick fought a duel with Judge Caleb B. Smith in which the latter's ball was stopped by a watch in Broderick's trouser pocket, causing him a painful contusion but no other injury. He was an adviser in several other affairs and was on the verge of fighting Sen. William M. Gwin when the duel with Terry intervened.

David S. Terry was born in 1823 to a family with a distinguished record of service in the colonial and Revolutionary wars. He grew up in Texas and fought in the Mexican War at Monterrey, Mexico. After being admitted to the bar, he moved to San Francisco and in 1855 was elected chief justice of the state supreme court, where he developed a reputation for the strictest integrity. He soon ran afoul of the powerful Vigilance Committee, to whose high-handed methods he objected. In June 1856, in a confrontation with a group of armed vigilantes, Terry pointed his pistol at their leader, Sterling Hopkins. Hopkins grabbed it, and during the ensuing struggle Terry drew his bowie knife and stabbed Hopkins in the neck, inflicting what seemed to be a mortal wound. Terry was arrested by the Vigilance Committee but released a few weeks later when Hopkins recovered.

Terry had never been a principal in a duel, though he had acted as a second to a lawyer, D.W. Perley, in one in Stockton in 1850. He had no particular reputation for skill with a pistol but was said to be a competent rifle shot.

Even though Terry and Broderick were political opponents, they held each other in high regard; Terry considered Broderick a brave man, and Broderick admired Terry's integrity. Their dispute arose during the acrimonious election campaign of 1859. In a speech in June of that year, Terry said of Broderick and his allies that "perhaps they do sail under the flag of Douglas, but it is the banner of the Black Douglass, whose name is Frederick, not Stephen."

Broderick was informed of these remarks, and, a few days later, encountering Terry's friend Perley he said, "The damned miserable wretch. . . . I have hitherto spoken of him as an honest man—as the only honest man on the bench of a miserable, corrupt Supreme Court—but now I find I was mistaken. I take it all back. He is just as bad as the others."

Perley said, "I will inform the Judge of the language you have used concerning him."

"Do so; I wish you to do so; I am responsible for it," responded Broderick.

"You would not dare to use this language to him," said Perley.

"*Would not dare!*" mocked Broderick.

Becoming incensed, Perley answered, "No sir, you would not dare to do it, and you know you would not dare to do it, and you shall not use it to me concerning him. I shall hold you personally responsible for the language of insult and menace you have used."

Two days later Perley sent Broderick a challenge, which Broderick refused for three reasons. First of all, he pointed out, Perley had publicized the affair, and "when affairs of this kind are to be arranged, it is customary to keep them secret even from intimate friends. While I have refrained from making mention of the affair, I find it to be the subject of newspaper comment, and the theme of public conversation." Second was the matter of their relative status: "If compelled to accept a challenge, it could only be with a gentleman holding a position equally elevated and responsible." Third, he did not feel he should duel during the election campaign: "If I were to accept your challenge, there are probably many other gentlemen who would seek similar opportunities for hostile meetings, for the purpose of accomplishing a political object, or to obtain public notoriety."

Terry, who had taken personal offense when he read Broderick's words in the newspaper, postponed his response until after the election, but on September 8, the day after Broderick was defeated, he wrote requesting a retraction. Some of Broderick's friends and political allies felt he should comply, but others considered reconciliation tantamount to caving in. Said one friend, Col. A.J. Butler, "The fight has got to come, and this is the best time for it. Broderick never had a better chance, and he isn't going to get hurt. He can hit the size of a ten-cent piece at his distance every time. These Chivs have got to learn that there is one man they cannot back down."

After Broderick refused to retract his comments, Terry wrote requesting "the satisfaction usual among gentlemen."

Broderick set the terms: pistols at 10 paces, parties facing each other, pistols to be held with the muzzles vertically downward until the signal, which was to be "Fire . . . one . . . two," rather than the usual count of three. This was clearly intended to give the practiced marksman Broderick an edge. Terry's seconds protested, but rather than back out Terry agreed.

Each principal was to bring a set of pistols, and a coin toss immediately prior to the duel would determine whose would be used. Terry borrowed pistols owned by Jo Beard, an ex-clerk of the state supreme court. These had been purchased by Beard's father many years earlier in Paris and had figured in several encounters. They were of .58 caliber, with 9 1/2-inch barrels, walnut stocks, and hair triggers. Terry test-fired each one at a target once and found that they shot slightly low. He then turned them over to a friend for safekeeping, since it was considered a violation of the code to overly familiarize oneself with the pistols that might be used in a duel.

The duel was set for 6 A.M. on Monday, September 12, at a field about a mile and a half from the southwestern edge of Lake Merced, south of San Francisco. When the parties arrived they were promptly arrested. Released after a court appearance, they simply rescheduled the meeting for the following morning.

That morning, the *Morning Call*, a pro-Broderick paper, wrote, "It is generally understood that Judge Terry is a first rate shot; but it is doubtful whether he is as unerring with the pistol as Senator Broderick. This gentleman, recently, in practicing in a gallery, fired two hundred shots at the usual distance, and plumped the mark every time. As he is also a man of firmer nerve than his opponent, we may look this morning for unpleasant news from the field."[1]

There is no question that Broderick was confident. When a friend, John White, wished him "safe deliverance," Broderick responded, "Don't you fear, John; I can shoot twice to Terry's once: beat him shooting every time." However, many of his friends felt that his nerves were drawn from the exhaustion of his just-concluded campaign.

Broderick and Terry met at dawn on September 13, in front of a crowd of 80-some spectators. The principals stood a short distance apart, chatting with their seconds. Broderick's seconds were Rep. Joseph McKibben and ex-sheriff David D. Colton, while Terry was seconded by Calhoun Benham and Col. Thomas Hays.

Terry's surgeon, Dr. William Hammond, arrived on the field, shook hands with Terry, and then casually lay down on his overcoat. Broderick's surgeon, a Dr. Loehr, attracted more notice: he had brought a large sack of surgical instruments, including a bone saw, which protruded from its top. The sack clattered disconcertingly as he dragged it behind him.

A half-dollar was flipped to determine the final arrangements. Terry's second won the choice of weapons. Broderick's second won the choice of position and the giving of the command.

By mutual agreement, a well-known local gunsmith, Bernard Lagoarde, known as "Natchez," was employed as armorer. He had been entrusted with both cases of pistols, and the seconds examined the pair chosen. After handling them, McKibben "snapped a cap, with an air of satisfaction."[2]

The seconds invited the principals to take their stations. Broderick's seconds placed him with his back to the rising sun.

The pistols were loaded and handed to the principals. Both men handed the contents of their pockets to their seconds, and then each was patted down by an opposing second to be sure he wore nothing that would cause a bullet to glance off.

Benham read over the conditions of the duel. Colton then said, "Gentlemen, I will give the word as follows: 'Gentlemen, are you ready?' When both have answered 'ready' I will say 'Fire—one, two,' with a pause between each word." Benham then repeated Colton's words.

O'Meara gave this account of the duel:

> Judge Terry stood erect and firm, but in easy attitude, with his body accurately sidewise to his antagonist, his pistol-arm hanging naturally, close to his person, with apparent readiness for full play to every muscle, his pistol in exact vertical position, and his legs precisely in line. His look was directed full toward Mr. Broderick, and his facial expression was of imperturbable composure, alive to the serious matter in hand.
>
> Mr. Broderick's whole frame revealed the tremendous power of his determination, and his face, pallid from the wasted condition of his system, incident to the exhaustion of the fatiguing and terrific campaign he had so recently concluded, showed the prodigious force of his will in the mastery of his shattered nerves, now held as in wonderful strain of rigidity. There was not the tremor of a fiber from crown to sole. But his rigor of body was so severe that he had not easy command of motion, or essential play of action of trunk or limb. . . . It was observed by the seconds of Judge Terry, that Mr. Broderick held his pistol, not vertically, as the articles required, but pointed outward in obtuse angle, and to this defect Mr. Benham called the attention of Colonel McKibben, who immediately went to Mr. Broderick's side to rec-

tify the wrong. His rigor of frame was so intense that, in the effort to adjust his pistol to the required position, he was obliged to use his left hand to bring his right arm into proper form; and in the effort he also so swerved his whole body that his right leg was pressed out of place, downward and forward, out of line with the left leg, and his chest was thrown out and quartering toward his antagonist, so as to present a larger surface for the chance of a shot aimed at him. He held his pistol in vise-like grip; and his wrist, instead of being in condition for ease of motion, was as an iron bolt, to move only with and as rigidly as the arm. He seemed the impersonation of that order of courage which faces death without terror, which prefers death to the reproach of fear. . . .

At nearly 7 o'clock that fated Tuesday morning, every other procedure of the awful scene having been adequately performed according to the articles, Mr. David Colton, the second of Mr. Broderick, upon whom the painful duty had been imposed, put the dread question, preliminary to the "word," "Gentlemen, are you ready?"

Instantly the response came from Judge Terry, "Ready," in firm, natural tone of voice, and without play of feature or movement of muscle. Mr. Broderick did not respond at once, but again occupied a few moments in adjusting his pistol. This done, evidently to his satisfaction, he spoke the word, "Ready," accompanied by a gesture and a nod, as of assent to Mr. Colton. Then came the "word," "Fire—one—two." The pause between the words was as that between the striking of the hours of "the cathedral clock," as one critical observer described it.

Almost at the "one," Mr. Broderick fired. The ball from his pistol entered the ground just nine

> feet from where he stood, in a true line with his antagonist. Judge Terry fired before "two" had been uttered. A slight show of dust upon the right lapel of Mr. Broderick's buttoned coat gave token where the ball had struck. In a moment Mr. Broderick's right arm was raised nearly in line from his shoulder and extended at full length; the left arm simultaneously moved in similar manner. In his right hand he still gripped his pistol. A visible shuddering of the body was instantly perceptible, then a violent contraction of the right arm, a relaxation of the fingers of the right hand, from which the pistol dropped to the ground. A heavy convulsion shook his quivering form, he turned toward the left, his head drooped, his body sunk, his left knee first gave away, then the right, and in a moment he was half-prostrate on the sod, his left arm supporting him from falling prone.[3]

"Hard hit," remarked Broderick's friends. His seconds rushed to his side, as did Dr. Loehr. Judge Terry stood at his position, erect, face raised, his arms folded. His seconds went to him, and he remarked to Benham, "The shot is not mortal; I have struck two inches to the right," or, according to other witnesses, "Ah! I struck him a little high."

According to a report in the San Francisco *Sun*:

> As soon as Broderick fell, Davis, the owner of the ranch, who had been silently regarding the proceedings, started to his feet and shouted, "That is murder, by God!" He moved toward Terry, as though intending to assault him. He was intercepted by bystanders, who said it was folly to provoke additional bloodshed. Davis brushed them aside, exclaiming, "I am Broderick's friend; I am not

> going to see him killed in that way. If you are men, you will join me in avenging his death."
>
> "We know you are Mr. Broderick's friend, but we know as well that if you attack Terry there will be a general fight, and but few will get off this ground alive. Think a moment before you do this thing."
>
> [Davis] was quieted and sat himself down, breathing threatenings of slaughter.[4]

It soon became obvious that Loehr was overwhelmed by the situation, and Terry's surgeon, Dr. Hammond, had to take over his duties. Assured that another shot would not be required, Terry then left the ground.

Hammond cut away Broderick's shirt. The ball had entered his right breast between his second and third ribs; passed under the sternum, fracturing the edge; passed over the heart; tore through the upper lobe of his left lung; struck the fifth rib on the left side and passed through the left armpit.

Returning to Oakland by boat, Terry was met by a friend who told him that the news was that Broderick had died. Terry denied that and told his friend that he would have inflicted no serious injury whatsoever had he not been convinced, by the newspaper reports of Broderick's deadly accuracy and by his demeanor on the ground, that he must shoot so as to prevent the risk of a second exchange.

Broderick was placed on a mattress in the back of a wagon and taken to the home of a friend. He said he felt as if a thousand-pound weight were pressing on his chest. To one friend he said, "I tried to stand firm when I was struck, but I could not. The blow blinded me." He died on September 16. His supporters described the duel as a political assassination, claiming that his last words were, "They have killed me because I was opposed to a corrupt administration and the extension of slavery. I die for a principle."

Broderick's death caused an uproar. Terry was accused of fixing the duel by giving Broderick a pistol with an overly sensitive trigger, despite the fact that Broderick's second had inspected the pistol before the duel and detected nothing amiss. Terry was also accused of having thoroughly familiarized himself with the weapons used. Broderick's vaunted marksmanship, a source of so much confidence to his supporters a few days before, was no longer discussed—it was now Terry who was described as the most expert pistol shot in the state.

Though Terry was acquitted of murder, he was convicted in the court of public opinion. To this day he is portrayed as the villain of the affair, probably as much for his Southern sympathies as anything else. In losing the battle, Broderick had won the war; in the 1860 election California went for Lincoln.

Terry retired from the bench and returned to private practice. When the Civil War broke out he volunteered in the Confederate cause and was wounded at the Battle of Chickamauga. By 1878 he had resettled in California and sufficiently redeemed his reputation to be elected to the state's constitutional committee.

In 1886, shortly after his wife died, Terry married a divorcée named Sarah Althea Hill, who had several brushes with the law. He was representing Hill in a court proceeding when she created a scene, causing Judge Stephen J. Field to order that she be removed. Leaping to her defense, Terry struck a marshal with his fist and pulled a sheath knife. As a result he was sentenced to six months for contempt, a punishment that was widely regarded as harsh and politically motivated. Terry resented it bitterly and was quoted as having said at the time, "I do not intend to injure Field bodily, but if the opportunity presents itself—while I do not seek it—I shall slap him in the face or horsewhip him. I have made up my mind to do that and nothing can alter my determination."[5]

In June 1889, shortly after he was released from prison, Terry encountered the judge in a restaurant. He walked up to him, slapped his face, and smacked him on the back of the head.

The judge's bodyguard drew a pistol and shot Terry twice in the chest, killing him.

The site of the Broderick-Terry duel now lies in a quiet park beside a golf course. Small granite posts mark the spot where each man stood.

NOTES

1. James O'Meara, *Broderick and Gwin: The Most Extraordinary Contest for a Seat in the Senate of the United States Ever Known* (San Francisco: Bacon & Co., 1881): 238.
2. "The Broderick-Terry Duel," *New York Herald*, October 13, 1859, p. 2, col. 2.
3. O'Meara, *Broderick and Gwin*, 239–241.
4. Truman, *Field of Honor*, 400–401.
5. Charles S. Potts, "David S. Terry: The Romantic Story of a Great Texan," *Southwest Review* 19 (April 1934): 333.

43

JOHN S. WISE VS. JOHN S. CROCKETT

JULY 25, 1882

It was understandable that John S. Wise had a certain predilection for dueling. He was the son of Virginia's Henry A. Wise, notorious for his role in the Cilley-Graves duel, and the younger brother of Obadiah Jennings Wise, who fought eight duels in defense of his father's reputation.

When John S. Wise ran for Congress in 1882, the hot issue was Virginia's state debt, pitting Funders, who favored paying it off, against Readjusters like Wise, who favored a partial repudiation of it. Wise got word that a political opponent, John S. Crockett, was claiming that in arguing for readjustment Wise had said that "honor will not buy a breakfast." A few weeks later, on July 17, Wise encountered Crockett lounging on the porch of a hotel in Marion and asked him if had made such statements. Crockett told Wise he had not and began to explain what he *had* said. After a few minutes Wise interrupted, saying, "Well, sir, I've heard enough to satisfy me that whatever you said, you lied." He gave Crockett the back of his hand, knocking him out of his chair. Crockett clambered to his feet and sprang at Wise, but bystanders quickly separated the two men, who were fined $2.50 each for disturbing the peace.

A week later Crockett's cousin, John Stewart Crockett, delivered a challenge to Wise. Accepting the challenge, Wise chose an old friend, George W. Ward, to act as his second. It was arranged that the parties would meet on the morning of July 25 at the depot at Bangs. Wise later described what followed to the Richmond *Evening Journal.*

> We walked down the road about a mile towards Yellow Sulphur Springs and found a pretty site. We took our positions about sunrise. I am very left-handed, and although an excellent shot, always used my left hand. When we took our positions I held my pistol in my left hand and stood with my heart exposed. Crockett's second whispered something to Ward and he came to me and said: "The cartel [the written agreement of a duel's terms] requires you to hold your pistol in your right hand and stand with your right side to your adversary."
>
> "D--n the cartel," said I; "I never heard of it before. Don't you know I am very left-handed?"
>
> Ward said he had signed a cartel such as I mentioned, but that he never thought of my being left-handed, even if he knew it—that it was a trick and he should take me off the field.
>
> "Not much!" said I; "I'll chance him this way!" So I changed around.
>
> At the first exchange of shots I missed him, realizing I had counted too confidently on being ambidextrous.
>
> As we were having the loaded weapons placed in our hands for a second shot Crockett's pistol accidentally exploded [fired] and he came near hitting his second. They made ample apologies, and while his weapon was being reloaded I laid mine on the grass.

> I was hopping mad by this time, and resolved to let him shoot [first] and [then] hit him. He fired quickly and I drew a dead bead on him and pulled down. But my pistol snapped! After holding on him in hopes it might still go off, until the time was out, I raised my muzzle, nodded to Ward, and when he came up told him what had happened.
>
> The seconds started off to reload. This cartel provided that the principals should stand in the positions assigned them until directed to leave.
>
> My adversary left his post, followed his second, and said something (I did not hear), and Mr. John Stewart Crockett, the second, turned to us and said, "Gentlemen, we are satisfied."
>
> I raised my hat and, addressing Mr. J. Stewart Crockett, said, "Well, sir, if your principal is satisfied I'll bid you good morning," and Ward and I walked away.

Wise was disdainful of Crockett's performance on three counts. He felt that the insistence he shoot right-handed was intended to put him at a disadvantage. He felt that under the code duello, having received a blow, Crockett should have continued to fire until one of them was disabled. He also objected to Crockett's leaving his position to speak with his second.

He concluded his account:

> I never spoke to John S. Crockett, and I'm sorry I did not. Thank God that my pistol failed, for I feel sure I would have killed him. I spoke that day in Christiansburg and was not arrested. We were, however, indicted, but they had no evidence, and the indictments were soon squashed.
>
> I then announced publicly, with no sort of quarrel on hand, that dueling was a farce and I had fought

> my last. Sometimes I have deeply regretted it, but, on the whole, I know I was right. Twenty-five years later Crockett's boy served under my son in the Philippines, and my boy said he was a good soldier. There was nothing embarrassing whatever connected with the duel except the silliness of all duels.[1]

Wise had his resolution tested soon afterward when he was attacked in print by W. Page McCarty, who had achieved notoriety by killing a romantic rival, John Mordecai, in a duel in 1873 with Colt Army revolvers. McCarty, who was severely wounded himself, was charged with first-degree murder after his recovery. Although he was acquitted, the barbarity of the duel shocked the community and made him something of a pariah. McCarty grew increasingly bitter and vindictive as he drifted between editorial jobs. While at the *Lynchburg Campaign*, he set his sights on Wise and attacked him relentlessly.

Wise responded to McCarty with the following letter, published on March 2, 1884:

> About twelve months ago, as is well known to many persons, I resolved never again to recognize the practice of duelling. A few weeks ago my political disabilities, incurred under the duelling act, were for the second time removed by the Legislature.[2] Public opinion will not sustain a duellist in any civilized community at the present time. . . .
>
> Since McCarty killed Mr. John B. Mordecai he has been going about smelling the blood on his hands and panting for more apparently. Without stake of any sort, he has maliciously sought to provoke difficulties; first with General Mahone, then with Senator Riddleberger, and now with myself. . . .
>
> Unmarried, penniless, without any fixed employ-

> ment, dissipated, with nothing to lose, he seems possessed of a devil and would no doubt deem it a mercy for some gentleman to kill him and ease his tortured brain and conscience. He may play Sir Lucius O'Trigger to his heart's content, boasting of his ancestry (every one of whom has killed his man), his family portraits and honor, but he must find somebody else than me to kill him.
>
> With a sweet home, filled with merry children, with enough to live comfortably, with a paying profession, I am happy and want to live. In God's name, what would a man like Page McCarty put in stake against this when we stood at ten paces with pistols? His abuse of me has no more effect than a dog barking at the moon. His invitation comes too late. Time has been when I might have been fool enough to indulge in such folly, but with age, and a broader view of life and its responsibilities and duties, I have bidden farewell forever to the McCarty type of manhood.[3]

McCarty retorted acidly, describing Wise as "a ridiculous little poltroon" and "a jackass, with apologies to the jackass," but was unable to provoke his adversary to fight. Wise's letter was credited with helping to drain any remaining prestige from the code duello in Virginia.

Some years later Wise reflected on his stand in an article for the *Saturday Evening Post*:

> I will frankly confess that there have been times when I have regretted that announcement bitterly, and when no pleasure in this world would have been greater than peeping at one or two cock-sparrow gentlemen along the barrel of a dueling pistol.

There were several who, until I tied my own leg, had been always civil. After that how loosely their tongues wagged! Well, thank Heaven I had the strength to adhere to my resolve. No doubt it is all for the best.[4]

NOTES

1. Clara McCarty, *Duels in Virginia and Nearby Bladensburg* (Richmond, VA: Dietz Press, 1976): 92–94.
2. At this time the Virginia constitution barred from office those who had fought a duel within the state borders.
3. Truman, *Field of Honor*, 443.
4. John Wise, "The Fire-Eaters," *Saturday Evening Post* 178 (June 23, 1906): 25.

44

COL. FRANCISCO ROMERO VS. ALBERTO SAMSON

JULY 25, 1882

COL. FRANCISCO ROMERO VS. LT. COL. JOSÉ VERÁSTEGUI

AUGUST 9, 1894

In the 1880s, at the same time that dueling was enjoying a revival in Europe, Latin American elites embraced it as an emblem of sophistication and modernity. They imported the finest European dueling pistols, as well as a number of French and Italian fencing masters. Cuba recorded 164 duels between 1880 and 1893, Argentina at least a hundred between 1904 and 1927, and Uruguay nearly 50 between 1914 and 1920.[1]

In his 1936 book, *El Duelo en Mexico*, Angel Escudero described three duels involving the senator Col. Francisco Romero. Escudero, who had gotten to know Romero when both frequented the same Mexico City fencing salon, described him as unmarried and without any vices except womanizing, and said that he divided his free time between fencing lessons and pistol practice. Romero was considered an expert on the code of honor and wrote the preface to the Mexican dueling code, published in 1891.

In 1890 he nearly fought a duel with a lawyer, Adalberto

Esteva, over insults exchanged in the newspapers. Negotiations broke down when Romero insisted on being regarded as the offended party, when in fact most observers considered him the offender. According to his second, General Sostenes Rocha, Romero wanted to reserve to himself the choice of weapons, preferring the saber, with which his expertise would enable him to be magnanimous.

In 1892, after Romero leaped to the defense of a political ally who had been maligned in the press, he became embroiled in a conflict with Alberto Samson, French-born editor of the *Trait d'Unión*. Samson accused Romero of having trained with weapons in order to intimidate his opponents; men like Romero, he wrote, "calculate their probabilities, adding the length of their arms and their legs, the excessive slimness of their torso, and their several years in the *salas de armas*," and only "when they think that the dangers to which they expose themselves are reduced to ten percent"[2] do they risk a duel. Romero responded that he would accept any weapons Samson chose, from cannons to fists to "embroidery needles and pillows." In the end, the seconds agreed that the weapon would be the sharpened saber.

The parties met on August 6, at 9 A.M. The terms were read, the combatants were given their sabers, and after the words *a la guardia* (on guard) and *adelante* (go), the duel commenced. Escuedero writes:

> Mr. Samson threw himself on Colonel Romero with the fierce impetuosity, with the uncontrollable ardor, the overwhelming impetus with which the soldiers of the old guard sent themselves to the attack. It was as if he made his cuts and slashes to the martial notes of the *Marseillaise* sung by a chorus of beautiful women. [Romero], with that sangfroid that never deserts him, skillful in this type of attack, gave ground in order to put himself outside the reach of his enemy's saber,

> and, taking advantage of the first opportunity, ended the fight with a great blow which cut across the pectoral muscle of the valiant Frenchman, so that he could not continue fighting.[3]

Romero fought his last duel on August 9, 1894, with Lt. Col. Don José Verástegui, the postal administrator, "a man, like his opponent, of mature age, herculean constitution, a perfect gentleman and a member of a family of brave men who had given distinguished military service to the Republic." As his seconds, Verástegui appointed Apolinar Castillo and Ramón Prida, while Romero's were Col. Lauro Carrillo and José Barreto. General Rocha was chosen as the *juez de campo* (umpire).

The dispute was attributed to jealousy over a married woman with whom both men were involved, though later evidence suggested it may have had more to do with their political differences. The precise reason remains obscure because Romero did not divulge it in the letter he gave his seconds, merely insisting that the duel be fought immediately. As they had no way to evaluate the seriousness of the provocation, there was no basis for negotiation.

Although his seconds tried to persuade him to select swords, Verástegui, who was an expert marksman, insisted on pistols, saying he did not want to be party to a farce. The terms were unusually severe, calling for pistols with rifled barrels, with shots being exchanged until one man was hit, and the adversaries taking a step toward each other after each shot.

The morning of the duel General Rocha went to a shooting range to pick up a set of pistols that had been cleaned and prepared for him. While there, he saw both Verástegui and Romero practicing their marksmanship in the company of their seconds. Rocha left the pistols in the care of one of Verástegui's seconds, Col. Lauro Carrillo, who dropped them off at a hotel on La Palma Street, and then Rocha, Carrillo, and Romero went to lunch together. As Rocha wrote:

There we spoke of inconsequential things that did not have to do with the coming duel. When we finished eating we took a car and we went to La Palma to gather the pistols. Romero had taken leave of us. The arms were given to us by the clerk and then we went to the Plaza to take one of the streetcars that pass by the Panteon Español, the place designated for the duel. When we arrived, I saw a car a little distance away, and it dropped off the gentlemen Prida and Castillo, who reconnoitered the terrain and chose the area that seemed the most appropriate for the duel. "How does it seem to you, general?" Castillo asked me; I looked around and the selection seemed good to me. Then they carefully measured the distance and indicated with magueys [century plants] the positions on which the principals should stand. All the seconds being in agreement, they tossed a peso in the air to decide who would have the choice of position, and it was won by the seconds of Verástegui. At this time it began to rain hard and we took refuge underneath a tree; there we spoke of duels, which we all deplored, and we agreed to modify the terrible nature of the terms. Castillo said that two or three shots would be enough; then I declared that a single shot would be sufficient, because the contenders were men of recognized worth and that that would satisfy the demands of honor. I was empowered to end the duel after the first shot.

As we spoke it had already stopped raining, so we called to the gentlemen Verástegui and Romero, that it was time to read them the final part of the act which contained the conditions of the duel, and I instructed them that they must obey the commands and shoot at the number three, not before and not after. Also I said to them to use the high guard [to point the pistols upward].

The arms were chosen and chance favored Romero. Because of that they say that I brought the pistols. This is not true, I had lent them to the seconds from my house so that they could see if they had any defects. They found them perfectly equal.

Castillo said to me: "General, if you would be so kind as to take the trouble to load them."

I took them; I put one in the box from which I took the powder magazine and the measure; I tossed the powder from a paper cartridge into the measure, and with just little more I filled it and leveled it off with my index finger, because I did not want the pistols to be loaded with a grain more or less of powder. Ah, I forgot to say that before loading I had given the pistols with primers only to the combatants, so that they could check if they were hard or soft [in the trigger], a very important thing, because when they are not familiar with the weapons, shooters usually respond to the commands either too early or too late, which could be interpreted as criminal or disgraceful.

Having placed the gentlemen Verástegui and Romero in their positions, I situated myself equidistant to them so that they would hear my commands at the same time. I gave them, and as I said "three!" I heard a single detonation. I saw that Mr. Verástegui inclined his head, and as he fixed his gaze on me I knew that he was mortally wounded. Mr. Prida took him in his arms and somebody called to the doctor. I said: "For what? He is already dead!" Dr. Casimiro Preciado came up and, cleaning the blood off his mouth, said that he was definitely dead. Mr. Romero, very affected, wanted to approach Verástegui to make some expression of affection, repentance, friendship. To him, I said: "Just leave, he is already dead, he will not answer."

> The four witnesses, deeply affected, hurried to pick him up and bring him to the car, and they did so slowly and carefully, as if he were still alive.
>
> I have been present at many duels as an umpire, as a witness, and as a principal, and I say with total conviction, that rarely have I seen individuals so loyal, so gentlemanly, noble, and brave, as Verástegui and Romero.[4]

The duel was the subject of a full-blown investigation in the national legislature, where the testimony focused not on whether murder had been committed, but on whether or not the dueling code had been properly observed. The fact that Romero had refused to disclose the nature of the offense for which he was seeking reparation, the fact that rifled weapons were used, the fact that both men had taken target practice immediately before the meeting—all were of greater concern than the fact that Romero had killed his colleague. Defense attorney Alfonso Lancaster Jones claimed that dueling was supported by public opinion and pointed out that "since our current trial system was established, there has not been a single verdict against the few duelists brought to trial."[5] Indeed, all the participants were ultimately acquitted.

Criticizing the immunity duelists enjoyed, congressman and journalist Francisco Bulnes pointed out that, contrary to Mexico's constitution, the laws were not applied equally to the rich and poor. What was considered a duel if it involved the former would be treated as an assault if it involved the latter, and all the trappings treated accordingly: "seconds" became accomplices, the procès-verbal became an illicit contract, the delay for "negotiations" became damning evidence of premeditation. "After his homicide," Bulnes wrote, "the duelist is usually acquitted . . . and he is considered more honorable than ever; while the poor man who commits the same crime in a fight . . . is sentenced to twelve years in prison for homicide . . . and is disgraced for life."[6]

The last fatal duel of significance in Mexico was fought with pistols in 1935, between the mayor and prosecuting attorney of Papantla, near Veracruz.[7] Dueling tapered off in Latin America in the 1950s, though duels were fought in Argentina and Uruguay in 1971. As recently as September 2002, a Peruvian congressman challenged the nation's vice president to duel him with pistols on a Lima beach. The challenge was not accepted.

NOTES

1. Parker, "Law, Honor, and Impunity."
2. Angel Escudero, *El duelo en Mexico* (Mexico: Imprenta Mundial, 1936): 229.
3. Ibid., 231.
4. Ibid., 233–234.
5. Pablo Piccato, "Politics and the Technology of Honor: Dueling in Turn-of-the-Century Mexico," *Journal of Social History* 33 (Winter 1999): 336.
6. Ibid, 337.
7. "Mexican Official Is Slain, Second Wounded in Duel," *New York Times*, June 11, 1935, p. 6, col. 3.

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HAUPTSTURMFÜHRER ROLAND STRUNK VS. GAULEITER HORST KRUTSCHINNA

OCTOBER 17, 1937

A duel of honor that occurred in Germany in 1937 may be the last known fatal duel conducted under the code of honor.

After having made his reputation as a valiant Austrian officer in World War I, Roland Strunk traveled throughout Turkey and the Far East and enjoyed considerable success writing about his adventures. In 1933 he became a reporter for the Nazi Party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter.* Hitler described him as Germany's only journalist of international stature, and Himmler accepted him into the SS with the rank of *Hauptsturmführer* (captain) the rank he had held in the Austrian army. He married an attractive woman several years his junior and settled in Berlin.

One evening, returning home from a trip several days earlier than anticipated, he entered his house to find that his wife was with another man, Horst Krutschinna, district commander of the Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth). The pair did not notice Strunk, who left discreetly and stayed at a hotel. That night he decided to challenge Krutschinna.

The SS had a code of honor, dating from 1935, that allowed for dueling but stipulated the use of sabers. Strunk would not be satisfied with a symbolic combat terminated at first blood. His friend and fellow journalist Gunter d'Alquen researched the code and found a footnote authorizing the use of pistols if either of the principals was afflicted with "a contagious disease communicable through the blood." Strunk, who had once contracted malaria, got the necessary documentation from his physician. He then challenged Krutschinna to a pistol duel, and Krutschinna accepted. Higher-ups in the SS and Hitler Jugend were kept ignorant of the affair.

The duel was scheduled for October 17, 1937, at 9 A.M., at Hohenlychen, 70 miles north of Berlin, in the garden of a medical clinic run by SS Gruppenführer Dr. Karl Gebhardt,[1] Himmler's personal physician. The weapon was to be the officer's model Mauser pistol, and Strunk was reported to have been a champion pistol shot during his army service. The ready availability of medical treatment would somewhat mitigate the danger.

Both men took their positions and fired on command. Krutschinna seemed to fire indifferently, while Strunk's bullet grazed his opponent's scalp.

A second exchange followed. Strunk's bullet passed through the fabric of Krutschinna's shirt, between his chest and upper arm. Now firing in defense of his life, Krutschinna shot Strunk in the abdomen, bringing him down.

Strunk was rushed into the clinic, where Gebhardt operated on him. The bullet had perforated his lower intestine in six places. In addition, Strunk was found to be suffering from an advanced case of intestinal tuberculosis. He died five days later. The theory was later advanced that, knowing his disease was terminal, he had chosen this swift and dramatic end.

Word of the duel's fatal consequences spread rapidly. As d'Alquen prepared the front page for *Völischer Beobachter*, he got a call from the Reich's press chief asking if he planned to cover it. When he said yes, the press chief put Hitler himself on the line. When Hitler heard that d'Alquen planned to describe the duel briefly, mentioning the SS code that governed it, he asked that the matter be handled differently. He said he was personally opposed to dueling, which proved nothing about the right or wrong of a situation, but only which man had the better aim. He further told d'Alquen that he would not tolerate losing officers as valuable as Strunk in such a manner, and asked that Strunk's death be ascribed to the observance of a vague and outmoded tradition. D'Alquen later said that this was the only time Hitler personally intervened in his news coverage.

The next day, after the story had been published, d'Alquen was summoned to the office of Reinhard Heydrich, head of the security police and SS intelligence. Heydrich, an Olympic-caliber fencer, gave him a severe dressing down for his treatment of the duel and then marched him down to the office of the SS chief, Heinrich Himmler. Himmler, who had fought a *Mensur* (university student duel) as a student, made his displeasure clear. After he finished, d'Alquen asked permission to speak. "What is there left to say?" demanded Himmler.

D'Alquen then revealed that his article had been virtually dictated by Hitler. At this news his superiors seemed to experience a sudden change of heart. The Führer had spoken. The following year in a speech to SS officers, Himmler stated that no one had the right to cost Germany useful strength through useless personal strife.

Henriette von Schirach, wife of the Hitler Jugend leader, later said that Hitler had told her his views on dueling were influenced by the film *Liebelei* (1932), which concluded with a tragic duel between a woman's husband and lover. As Hitler observed, "His wife was insulted—he was killed. Where's the logic?" In principle, he joked, he would limit dueling to lawyers and priests.

NOTE

1. Gebhardt was executed after the war for illegal medical experiments at Ravensbrück.

Part 3

VARIATIONS ON THE DUEL

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DUELS ON HORSEBACK

Since military officers went into battle on horseback, it is not surprising that in the early years of dueling many of them chose to duel from the saddle as well.[1] The weapons were usually those of the cavalryman, a saber and two horse pistols slung in saddle holsters. Riding toward each other, the principals fired their pistols and, if that did not settle the issue, finished with swords.

Scottish military veteran and fencing master Donald McBane gave this advice:

> If you Fight with *Sword* and *Pistol* on *Horseback*, take care your Pistol or Pistols be in good order, your Sword slung on your Right Arm.[2] Pistols Cocked in your holsters, that you may be in readiness, shorten your Bridle Reins, mount your Horse-head to cover yours, face your Horse-head to cover yours, face your Horse-head directly to your Enemy, bowing your Head in a line between his Ears, that your Head may not be seen, you may discharge one

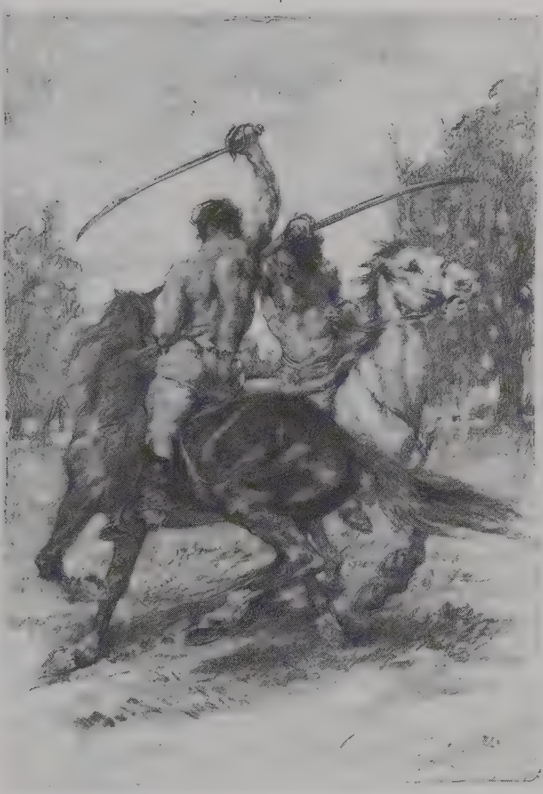
> Pistol at your first Rancounter to halt his Horse, which will put him out of the Posture he was in, if you miss him and Horse, take care to have your Horse-head in a direct Line with him, so as to be on your Guard that way. Pistol Discharged, take care to have your Sword ready, and above all Things Guard your Bridle Reins, and if possible to have the Right-hand, so that when your Enemy makes a Cut at your head, you may Defend it with an Outside or *St. Georg's Guard*,[3] at the same time giving him a Back stroak, which often proves fatal.[4]

Sword fighting from horseback relied less on fencing skill than on horsemanship, especially the ability to make the horse sidestep and wheel on its haunches. If a man could maneuver his horse so that he was attacking his opponent from his left-rear quadrant, he had a great advantage, because his opponent had to twist in his saddle and reach across his own chest to defend himself.[5] Edward Lord Herbert wrote that "to get this advantage, which they call in French, *gagner la crouppe* [to gain the rear], nothing is so useful as to make a horse to go only side ward 'till his adversary be past him, since he will by this means avoid his adversary's blow or thrust, and on a suddain get on the left hand of his adversary."[6]

The most obvious target in such a duel was not the horseman but his horse, which might panic at even a minor injury. Sword blows were also directed at the reins and the rider's bridle arm.

The most unusual horseback duel on record—indeed, one of the oddest duels of any kind—was fought between Capt. Jeffrey Hudson and Charles Crofts.

Born in 1619, Jeffrey Hudson was a dwarf who by his seventh birthday was only 18 inches tall. Queen Henrietta Maria adopted him as a sort of pet and in 1643 she gave him a commission in her horse guard. Even though for years he had been



the butt of pranks, as an adult he was no longer content to play the fool and announced that he would issue a challenge to the next man who insulted him. Fellow courtier Charles Crofts promptly provoked him and accepted the resulting challenge with glee. The two met on October 16, 1644, in front of a crowd of their peers. When Crofts was told to choose his weapon, he pulled out a "squirt," a large syringe used as a 17th-century fire extinguisher. While this brought forth gales of laughter from the crowd, it only hardened Hudson's resolve. He demanded that the duel go forward, with pistols, on horseback.

The men faced off 100 yards apart. As they charged, Hudson had the advantage that his opponent could not see him above the head of his mount. When they were only yards apart, Hudson fired, hitting Crofts in the head and killing him instantly. As a consequence of the duel Hudson was banished from court.

A more typical horseback duel is described in a letter from Ireland dated April 13, 1733:

> This day sevenight, a bloody action happened in the neighbourhood of Mitchelstown between one Newell, gamekeeper to Lord Kingston, and a son of the late Ned Raymond's, wherein the latter was slain. The cause of quarrel was about a greyhound, and so trivial as not worth naming. They entered the lists on horseback with sword and petronel [a carbine-like musket of large caliber], the former having discharged at and missed the latter, the other rode up to his breast but missed fire, whereupon he immediately dismounted and drew, as Newell did the like, and having some sasas [passes] at each other, both received some slight wounds, but still the combat lasted, till at length one of Raymond's spurs got hold of his stockings, whereby he fell on his face to the ground, at which the other stabbed him through the back, and [he] not long after expired.[7]

In his memoir, Sir Jonah Barrington provides a vivid description of another such duel:

> The ancient mode of dueling in Ireland was generally on horseback. The combatants galloped past each other, at a distance marked out by posts which prevented a nearer approach; they were at liberty to fire at any time from the commencement to the end of their course, but it must be at a hand-gallop; their pistols were charged alike with a certain number of bullets, slugs, or whatever was most convenient, as agreed.
>
> My grandfather, Colonel Jonah Barrington, of Cullenaghmore, had a great passion for hearing and telling stories of old events, particularly respecting duels and battles fought in his own neighbourhood or by his relatives . . . and his face bore, to the day of his

death, ample proof that he had not been idle among the combatants of his own era. The battle I remember best, because I heard it oftenest and through a variety of channels, was one of my grandfather's, about the year 1759. He and a Mr. Gilbert had an irreconcilable grudge: I forget the cause, but I believe it was a very silly one. It increased however every day, and the relatives of both parties found it must inevitably end in a combat, which, were it postponed until the sons of each grew up, might be enlarged perhaps from an individual into a regular family engagement. It was therefore thought better that the business should be ended at once; and it was decided that they should fight on horseback on the green of Maryborough; that the ground should be one hundred yards of race, and eight of distance; the weapons of each, two holster pistols, a broad-bladed but not very long sword . . . with basket handle, and a skean, or long, broad-bladed dagger; the pistols to be charged with one ball and swan-drops.[8]

The entire country, for miles round, attended to see the combat, which had been six months settled and publicly announced, and the county trumpeter, who attended the judges at the assizes, was on the ground. My grandfather's second was a Mr. Lewis Moore, of Cremorgan, whom I well recollect; Gilbert's was one of his own name and family—a captain of cavalry.

All due preliminaries being arranged, the country collected and placed as at a horse-race, and the ground kept free by the gamekeepers and huntsmen mounted, the combatants started, and galloped towards each other. Both fired before they reached the nearest spot, and missed. The second course was not so lucky. My grandfather received many of

Gilbert's shot full in his face; the swan-drops penetrated no deeper than his temple and cheekbones; the large bullet fortunately passed him. The wounds, not being dangerous, only enraged old Jonah Barrington; and the other being equally willing to continue the conflict, a fierce battle, hand-to-hand, ensued; but I should think they did not close *too* nearly, or how could they have escaped with life?

My grandfather got three cuts, which he used to exhibit with great glee: one on the thick of the right arm, a second on his bridle-arm, and the third on the inside of the left hand. His hat, which he kept to the day of his death, was also sliced in several places; but both had iron skullcaps under their hats, which probably saved their brains from remaining upon the green of Maryborough.

Gilbert had received two pokes from my grandfather on his thigh and his side, but neither dangerous. I fancy he had the best of the battle, being as strong as, and less irritable than, my grandfather, who, I suspect, grew towards the last a little ticklish on the subject—for he rushed headlong at Gilbert, and instead of striking at his person, thrust his broadsword into the horse's body as often as he could, until the beast dropped with his rider underneath him. My grandfather then leaped off his horse, threw away his sword, and putting his skean, or broad dagger, to the throat of Gilbert, told him to ask his life or die, as he must do either one or the other in half a minute. Gilbert said he would ask his life only upon the terms that without apology or conversation, they should shake hands heartily and be future friends and companions, and not leave the youths of two old families to revenge their quarrel by slaughtering each other. These terms being quite agreeable to my grandfather,

> as they breathed good sense, intrepidity, and good heart, he acquiesced; and from that time they were the most intimately attached and joyous friends and companions of the county they resided in.[9]

In his memoir of the Peninsular War, Gen. Sir Thomas Brotherton left an account of single combat on horseback before the Battle of Salamanca in June 1812. This is not a duel of honor, but it follows the form closely enough to warrant inclusion.

> I had an encounter, in single combat, this day with a very young French officer, between the two lines of skirmishers, French and English, who stood still, by mutual consent, to witness it. The French officer showed great cunning and skill, seeing the superiority of my horse, for he remained stationary to receive me, and allowed me to ride round and round him, whilst he remained on the defensive. He made several cuts at the head of my horse, and succeeded in cutting one of my reins and the forefinger of my bridle-hand, which was, however, saved by the thick glove I wore, though the finger was cut very deeply to the joint. As my antagonist was making the last cut at me, I had the opportunity of making a thrust at his body which staggered him, and he made off. I thought I had but slightly wounded him, but I found, on inquiry the next day, when sent on a flag of truce, that the thrust had proved mortal, having entered the pit of his stomach. I felt deeply on this occasion and was much annoyed, as I had admired the chivalrous and noble bearing of this young officer. He was a mere youth, who, I suppose, thought it necessary to make this display as a first essay, as French officers usually do on their first appearance in the field, and indeed, I believe it is expected of them by

> their comrades. I shall never forget his good-humoured, fine countenance during the whole time we were engaged in this single combat, talking cheerfully and politely to me, as if we were exchanging civilities instead of sabre cuts. . . .
>
> The cut I received on the forefinger of my bridle-hand proved a great grievance for some time, as it prevented me from playing the violin for weeks—a great deprivation, as I always played in bivouac at night.[10]

A horseback duel was fought in New Orleans in 1836, after Lieutenant Schamburg of the 2nd Dragoons, U.S. Army, quarreled with Adolphe Cuvillier, a popular member of Creole society. Angry words culminated in a street fight, in which Schamburg wounded Cuvillier with a sword cane. Cuvillier responded with a challenge. This put Schamburg in a ticklish situation: he was reluctant to refuse, but military officers had been ordered not to fight civilians. Schamburg decided that his best bet was to propose terms very much to his own advantage, in the hope that they would be rejected. He therefore demanded that the duel be fought on horseback with cavalry sabers, knowing that his opponent knew nothing of that weapon and was a mediocre equestrian. Nevertheless, Cuvillier's seconds accepted, asking only that their man be given a week to prepare. One of the seconds, Mandeville Marigny, had trained at the French military academy and was a commissioned cavalry officer. He borrowed a spirited but docile horse for Cuvillier, and set about bringing him up to speed.

Schamburg's commanding officer, Colonel Oliver, lent him his fine, milk-white stallion for the duel, which was held at the Carrollton racetrack. News of the affair had spread and a large crowd gathered. Schamburg wore the dragoon undress uniform of an officer and carried the long, straight sword of a French cuirassier, while Cuvillier was dressed in civilian attire and armed with the regulation U.S. Army sword.

The riders were stationed 100 yards apart. At the command "Charge!" both men put spurs to their mounts. Cuvillier held his sword pointed straight forward, while Schamburg waved his over his head. At the first pass, Schamburg's horse leaped aside, causing Cuvillier's thrust to miss. Leaning low onto his pommel, Cuvillier evaded a cut aimed at his head.

The riders went back to their posts, and, after a breathing spell for the horses in which their girths were adjusted, prepared for another round. In the next charge, Schamburg's stallion reared up just as Cuvillier delivered a powerful cut. Its jugular vein severed, it fell and died on the spot, ending the duel.

Colonel Oliver, somewhat put out by the loss of his fine stallion, which was worth $500, asked Schamburg to pay for it. Schamburg, in turn, wrote to Cuvillier, pointing out that since he had killed the horse it might be proper for him to cover its cost. Cuvillier declined. Schamburg declined as well, telling Oliver that a man who lends an animal for such a purpose must be conscious of the risk.

So, of the participants in this duel, it was the horse and its owner who paid the highest price.

NOTES

1. This has precedent in the judicial duel, in which gentlemen fought on horseback with their offensive arms, while vassals and peasants fought on foot with quarterstaff and buckler.
2. The sword would be secured to the wrist with a loop.
3. In the St. George's guard the sword is held horizontally above and in front of the head to block downward cuts.
4. McBane, *Expert Swordsman's Companion*, 69.
5. For the tactics of fencing on horseback, see Amberger, *The Secret History of the Sword*, 23–30; H.R. Hershberger, *The Horseman* (New York: H.G. Langley, 1844).
6. Herbert, *Life of Edward Lord Herbert*, 51.
7. From the Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Fifteenth Report*,

Appendix, Part VII. The Manuscripts of the Duke of Somerset, the Marquis of Ailesbury, and the Rev. Sir T.H.G. Puleston, Bart (London: printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office by Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898): 314.

8. Swan drops: large shotgun-type pellets.
9. Jonah Barrington, *Personal Sketches of His Own Time*, 1:299–300.
10. Gen. Sir Thomas Brotherton, *A Hawk at War: The Peninsular War Reminiscences of General Sir Thomas Brotherton, CB* (Chippenham, UK: Picton Publishing, 1986): 51–52.

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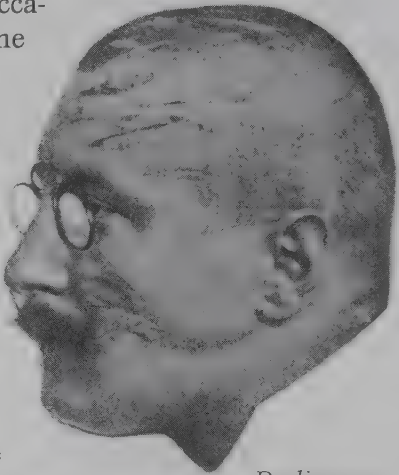
THE MENSUR (GERMAN STUDENT DUEL)

No one who visited Germany in the 50 years before World War I failed to notice the university students with their colorful identifying caps and sashes, and "faces slashed, seamed, and sewn up like a patchwork quilt."[1] Mark Twain, who toured Europe in 1878, described these scars as seeming to "form a city map on a man's face."[2] Another visitor wrote, "On one occasion, I observed a young gentleman with the point of his nose carefully wrapped up, and held by a sling which was fastened to his cap."[3] Such scars were borne proudly, since they showed that a student belonged to one of the fraternities that required members to fight a set number of duels.

Whether or not the student duel, or *Mensur*, belongs in a volume on dueling is debatable. Because it was usually fought without a cause and the potential risk was limited, some would argue that it was more of a sport than a duel. However, the same criteria would rule out most latter-day French duels as well; it is worth noting that Mensuren were responsible for occasional deaths as late as the 1920s and 1930s, while fatalities in French duels were virtually unknown in the 20th century. Finally, true duels, "hate duels," were occasionally arranged under the same terms as the Mensur.

German students had an association with the sword dating as far back as the 13th century, when Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II recognized scholars as forming a nobility of learning and thus entitled to wear the noble sidearm. In the late 1500s German students were gripped by the dueling mania that swept Europe. Every university had a fencing master, and his position was an important one: a top *Fechtboden* attracted more students than did any professor in the more sedate disciplines. It was not uncommon for students to settle their quarrels in the street, often with a crowd of passersby gathering around to cheer them on and critique their skill. Professor Wolfgang Heyden delivered a scathing indictment of the swashbuckling student in 1607:

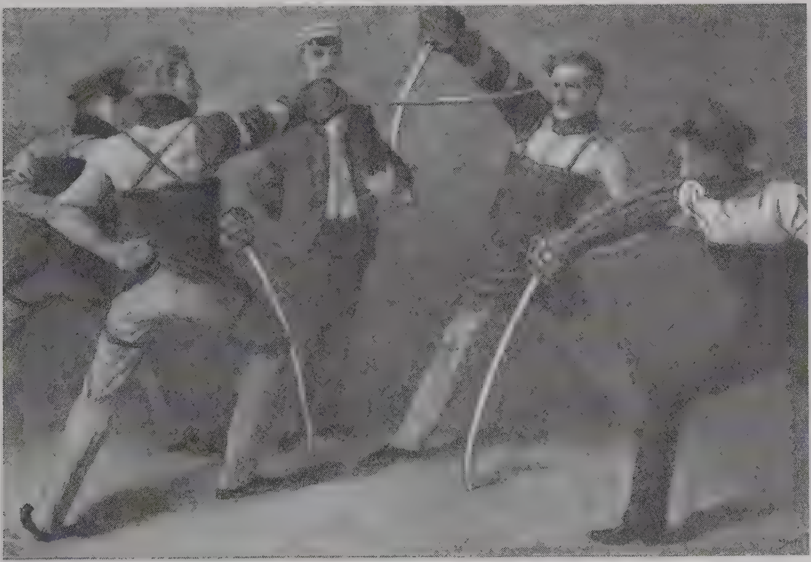


Dueling scars.

> Come you unawares into his room, what will you find? Not books; what has this fighting-cock to do with book-learning? Any book he possesses is soon tossed into a corner, a prey to moths and mice. But hanging on the walls you will find sundry rapiers and daggers . . . you will find shirts and gloves of mail, also doublets stuffed with horsehair and whalebone, so that this great man may never go to the place of combat unarmed. You will find tankards and glasses awaiting newcomers, cards, dice, and other utensils for the squandering of money and

> the perdition of youth. . . . All the afternoon he sits in the tavern or sleeps, to recruit his energies before a night's brawling, in order that every one may then notice how fierce and brave is his demeanor. . . . When he leaves the university at length, behold him—yellow, haggard, one-eyed, toothless, patched up and scarred, utterly wrecked! Such is the outcome of the sublime student life![4]

In his autobiography, Friedrich Christian Laukhart painted a similar picture of student life at Giessen in the mid-18th century: "Small as the university is, many brawls take place daily. In my time it was customary to fight in the public street, although, if the intention was known, it was certain to be betrayed to the authorities. The challenger would stop before his adversary's window, and drawing his spadroon[5] would make a show of sharpening it against the walls of his house,



Student duel with heavy sabers.

calling out loudly, '*Pereat der Hund und Schweinekerl! Tief! Pereat*!' [Damn you, you dog, you pig! Damn you!] Whereupon the challenged one would not be long in appearing, and the fight would begin."[6]

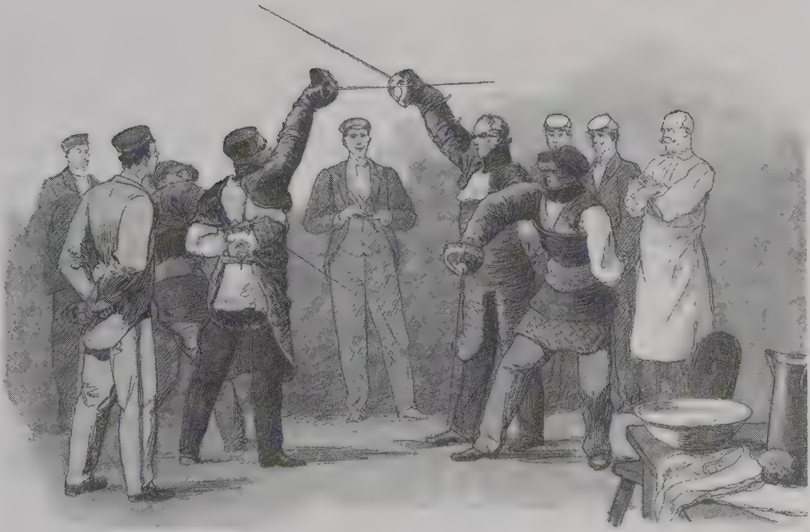
After the Napoleonic Wars, student duelists, under pressure from the authorities, adopted a less injurious style of dueling in which the thrust was prohibited and vulnerable parts of the body were well protected. In 1837 Dr. Heinrich Leo wrote, "In fist-thick wadded leathern duelling breeches, with fist-thick wadded girdle, with ell-long gloves made of leather an inch in thickness, with broad-rimmed double-felted duelling hats, lined with leather or tin, what harm can happen to one who is thus accoutered? He is safer than a knight in his iron coat."[7] Nevertheless, students still occasionally suffered mortal wounds. Attacks were delivered with all the force of the forearm and with a complete lunge, and as one observer pointed out, "An attack with a slender, albeit pointless weapon, although intended as a cut, would often when delivered on the lunge have the practical effect of a thrust."[8] After a spate of deaths at the University of Jena in 1844, protective clothing was improved, and a style was developed that called for opponents to stand at close measure—or *Mensur*—with the sword arm held high and blows delivered with a half-lunge or flip at the face and scalp. Most parrying was done with the padded sword arm. Blows that were not parried inflicted wounds that bled copiously but were generally not serious, and left the duelist cosmetically enhanced with *Renommierschmisse* (bragging scars), emblems of social status that provided entrée to top positions in the military, law, medicine, academia, and government.[9]

Though there was skill involved in the Mensur, it was not as important as a fearless, aggressive bearing. As long as a man didn't flinch, cry out, or retreat, as long as he controlled his fear (*der inner Schweinehund*), he suffered no discredit from getting the worst of an encounter. No winner was declared at the end.

New fraternity members, called *Füchse* (foxes), had to prove themselves in two or three duels, and after that might have to fight a dozen or more with members of rival fraternities. Otto von Bismarck is said to have fought 26 times while a student, in the course of which he received only one small scar.

Most duels were impersonal affairs between combatants who might not even have met previously. Perhaps a quarter of them were fought over insults, although, as one observer wrote, "the student seldom fights because he is insulted, but insults because he wishes to fight."[10] Someone might rib another a little too aggressively, purposely jostle him on the sidewalk, or step on his dog's tail. The most serious verbal insult was *dummer Junge* (foolish fellow); according to the student honor code, it could be answered by no further insult, but only by a challenge.[11]

Because duels were technically illegal, they were not held



A classic Mensur.

on university grounds but in rented halls on the outskirts of town, usually on the second floor of a tavern, with "foxes" posted on the surrounding streets to keep an eye out for the police. In the center of the hall, a dueling area about 12 by 12 feet would be cleared. Around it were chairs and tables where fraternity members sat and drank copious amounts of beer. As many as a half-dozen different fraternities might be present, differentiated by their hats and sashes, and the relationship between them was one of studied indifference. Between duels there was a din of conversation and constant toasts of *Prosit!* but when they were on, a respectful silence surrounded the clattering of the blades and the thud of strikes against well-padded arms. Duels lasted either until one man was too injured to continue or a set number of rounds was completed, anywhere from 30 to 80, with from four to eight cuts per round. Routine duels lasted about 15 minutes, and duels over insults 25 minutes. There might be as many as 20 duels fought in a day.

In preparation for a duel, a student was dressed in protective gear that included a sleeve of wadded silk extending from the wrist to the shoulder; a heavy fencing gauntlet; a neck guard; a thick leather pad buckled over his armpit to protect the tendons and arteries; and leather *Paukhosen* (fighting britches) which covered the front of the body from the breast nearly to the knees. The Paukhosen had a leather tag or belt at the small of the back that the duelist gripped with his left hand to keep it out of the way. All of this gear was stiff and stained with blood shed in hundreds of previous encounters. To protect their eyes, duelists wore iron goggles that stuck out about an inch from the face and were secured with a wide leather strap that passed over the ears, offering them some protection as well.

Once the duelist was fully dressed, a sword was put in his hand. Curved sabers were sometimes used in serious duels, but a Mensur was normally fought with the less dangerous *Schläger.* The Schläger had a straight, flexible blade about 40 inches long, the end blunted, and both edges ground as sharp as a scalpel near the end. It was fitted with either a large bell guard or basket hilt.

Each duelist would be accompanied to the center of the room by a friend, who supported his heavily encumbered sword arm. The duelists took their positions about three feet from each other, each standing on a cross marked with chalk on the floor. From this mark they were not allowed to advance or retreat by so much as an inch during the duel.

Each second stood to the left of his principal, wearing a cap with a heavy visor, a pad with the corps colors over the stomach, and carrying a basket-hilted sword. During the duel, it was the seconds' responsibility to call for a halt instantly in the event of a wound or damaged equipment, and to watch for mistakes on the part of the opponent. Wearing heavy leather gloves, they could straighten a blade should it become bent. Once the danger of infection had become understood, it was normal for the blades to be wiped with antiseptic before each bout.

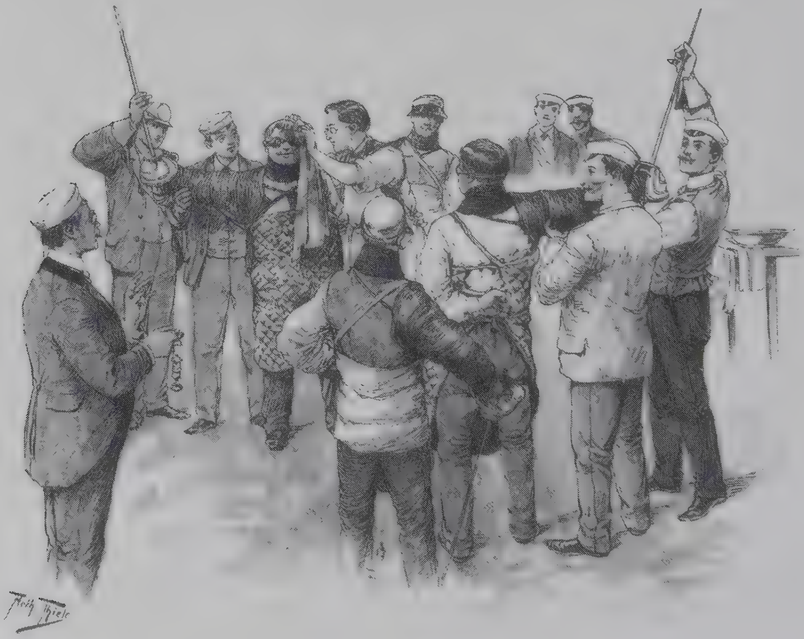
The umpire stood a few feet to the side of the combatants. His duty was to count the rounds, to give word for the various halts, and to declare the number of blows that drew blood.

To signal the start of th duel, the umpire would command silence. One of the seconds would order "*Auf der Mensur. Bindet die Klingen.*" (On the mark. Touch blades.) Each duelist raised his right arm over his head, the sword pointing downward, guarding the left side of his face. The other second would respond, "*Sind gebunden.*" (They are crossed.) At the command "*Los!*" (Go) the bout would begin. Each man tried to reach over his opponent's protecting arm and strike his scalp or left cheek.

When one of the men was hit, the duel would be halted. "Umpire!" would shout one of the seconds, "please declare a *Blutigen* [a bloody one]!" The umpire would call time, and a doctor would run forward to examine the cut. Unless it was significant, the fight would go on.

After a duel, participants removed their protective clothing and, if they had been cut, retired to a side room occupied by the doctor. This was as much a part of the ritual as the fight itself, as participants were expected to show no sign of pain as they were doused with iodine and stitched up. The fraternity kept a book in which it entered the number of cuts received and how many stitches they required, and this became the official record of the duel. Near the doctor's bench were a few large basins of water where injured duelists could clean off the blood. Wrote one observer, "Towards the end of the washing process the bowls of hot water look like enormous tureens of thick, warm, red cabbage soup."[12]

Hideous gashes were sometimes inflicted. A nose might be split or an ear lopped off, the scalp opened to the bone. In a saber duel Gordon Bolitho witnessed in the 1930s, one partici-



Checking for wounds.

pant's "face was cut from the left eye to the upper lip: I saw the gash open and show the gums and teeth inside. . . . Fifty-three stitches were necessary to sew up the gashes."[13] There is an account of a duel in which the tip of a student's nose was cut off and quickly snapped up by a bulldog in the room.

It is often said that, as scars were prized, the stitching was deliberately clumsy and that a student sometimes had a horsehair sewn into the gash to ensure it healed poorly or poured wine on it to inflame it. Defenders of the Mensur dismissed these allegations, saying that the crude stitching was due only to the poor caliber of the doctors available for the duty, most of whom were medical students.

After he was bandaged, the duelist returned to the main room and joined his friends.

Sometimes a lookout would announce that the police were approaching. The duelists were hurried away and their trappings removed, swords tossed into a closet, sawdust sprinkled over the blood on the floor, and tables pulled into the center of the room. When the authorities entered all they would find was a group of students sitting over their beer.

In the unlikely event that a student was arrested for dueling, he was usually given a few months' confinement in the *Karzer*, three or four rooms maintained by the university as a prison, and even these sentences were routinely commuted.

James Morgan Hart, who attended the University of Göttingen, describes a Mensur he witnessed in the winter of 1861–1862:

> About a third of a mile outside the town, on the right hand of the *chaussée*, stands the well-known tavern and concert-room *Zum Deutschen Hause*. By the side of it is a smaller tavern. Here we entered, and, passing through the public rooms below, ascended a narrow rickety stairway in the rear to the upper story. In the first room that we

entered, a small one, was a stand holding a barrel of beer, from which one or two waiters were busily filling *Schoppen* [pints] for the thirsty souls in the room beyond. This, the *Mensur* itself, was a room about twenty-five feet by forty, rather low-ceilinged, and lighted by two windows at each end. The atmosphere was dim and heavy with smoke; groups of students stood around, puffing, drinking, boisterously talking. One or two were practicing "cuts" in the corners of the room, to the imminent peril of the ears and nose of any who might happen to stray into their vicinity. A duel was going on between two *Füchse*. The combatants wore caps in addition to the general defensive armor . . . and each had his second by his left side, whose business it was to parry the dangerous blows. The two combatants did their best, only to be ridiculed for their pains. Like all beginners, they tried to make up in rude force what they lacked in address. The swords got entangled every minute or two, and nearly every blow fell *flach*, i.e., with the flat of the sword instead of with the edge. The utmost that the better of the two did was to saw off a lock of hair from his antagonist's head and scratch his cheek enough to draw blood. The by-standing veterans indulged in various cheering remarks, such as: "Well hit," "Try it again," or, when a blow fell *flacher* than usual, "Where did you learn that?" "Here's a bumper to your royal good health." The affair was evidently a farce to all but those immediately involved.

The duel came to an end soon after we entered the room. The rule is that the duelists must fight either fifteen minutes (stops not included) or until one of them is *abgeführt*, literally "led away," i.e., receives a wound that reaches to the bone or is pronounced dangerous by the surgeon in attendance. If no *Abfuhr* is declared, the umpire pronounces the duel over at the end of fifteen minutes. The two "foxes," accordingly, fought out their time and were released, greatly to their own satisfaction. Preparations were then made for the affair of the day, the duel between M—— and Von H——.

Mensur duels, as a matter of course, are fought with the *Schläger*, a long, thin, and narrow sword with a basket-hilt. One edge is left perfectly dull; the other is sharpened for about twenty inches from the end, which is not a round point but blunt. The guard, or position, does not resemble in the least that of the *sabreur* or the small-swordsman; it is something peculiar to itself. . . . [While it] would be useless for sabre or fleuret fighting, [it] will be found to be a perfectly natural one for defending the face and head. The cut of the *Schläger* is not the heavy, downbearing blow of the sabre, still less the thrust of the fleuret; it is a short, quick, whipping motion, whereby the swordsman, keeping his arm in the same general position, lets the sword revolve with the hand on a free wrist, as it is called, and tries to cut over or under his adversary's guard. This peculiar whipping movement is not to be described, and can be acquired only by long and incessant practice. In the hand of an experienced fencer, the *Schläger*, although of course inflexible in the line of its edge, seems actually to coil over one's guard, like the snapper of a whip.

Bloodshed aside, the general appearance of the duelists is very comical. The pad and cravat and spectacles make them look somewhat like a pair of submarine divers in their armor. Then, it is interesting to watch the left hand pulling on the tag in convulsive sympathy with the movements of the right hand. Whenever the swords become entangled, or a wound or what seems to be a wound is given, the umpire cries, *Halt!* The seconds then separate their principals, and the doctor makes his examination. This constitutes a round. As the hanging guard is a fatiguing one, and as lowering the sword-arm would be tantamount either to a signal of defeat or an evidence of cowardice, the principal is allowed to rest his arm on the shoulder of his second in the intervals between the rounds. I doubt whether the civilized world can afford an odder sight than that of a student in full panoply pacing up and down the *Mensur* and leaning his sword-arm confidingly on his corps brother's shoulder, while the surgeon gravely inspects his adversary's head.

The duel between M—— and Von H—— was to be, in technical phrase, *ohne ohne*, that is, without caps and without seconds. The principals had their seconds, it is true, but these did not stand by during the round and ward off *Tiefquart* [an upward diagonal forehand cut] or other dangerous blows; they kept back, and only advanced to part the principals when the umpire cried, *Halt*. Nor did the principals wear the corps-cap; head and face, with the exception of the eyes, were entirely exposed.

Whatever else it may or may not do, the German *Mensur* certainly gives the observer a good field for studying diversity of character. M—— and Von H—— were placed face to face, seven or eight paces apart. Everybody became breathless with attention. The second of one party cried, *Legt aus*, lay out, i.e., get ready, get on guard; the other responded, *Sie liegen aus*, they are ready. The umpire called out, *Los!* The combatants took each three steps in advance and came up to position; the duel had begun.

Von H——, a swordsman of good standing, very

Stitching the wounds. A staged photo with a tastefully minimal amount of blood.

popular and very plucky, was tall, slender but vigorous, and attractive in his mien and manners; his face bore the marks of one or two previous encounters. M——, on the other hand, was rather undersized, almost burly in appearance, but with keen dark eyes and a resolute, one might say an "ugly," set to the mouth. Although his face was as smooth and full of color as that of a girl, his action and expression made it evident that he was a dangerous man. In addition to quickness and coolness, he had the great advantage of being left-handed.

Von H——, who had apparently studied his antagonist's style, was bent upon giving him plenty to do. Being taller by several inches, he sought to improve the advantage by making a furious attack, striking four or five *Hochquart* [a downward diagonal forehand cut] in rapid succession, in the attempt to beat down M——'s guard or to reach over it and cut the back of his head. But for this M—— was altogether too cool and firm. Parrying each attack with his arm, which he kept in perfect position, he merely made an occasional upward feint, an easy flirt of the sword, rather than a decided cut. It was evident that he acted strictly on the defensive, and bided his opportunity. In this way three rounds were fought in about as many minutes. Von H——'s chin was slightly grazed, M—— had not been touched at all. In the fourth round, Von H—— made a more furious onslaught than usual, reaching very far over, and it seemed as if he had at last succeeded in cutting the back of M——'s head. The umpire cried, *Halt*, and M—— had to submit to the doctor's inspection; he did so with a bad grace, smiling ironically, as if to say: *What nonsense*. The surgeon could not find any wound, and round number five was called. As M—— came to position, I noticed that he thrust his forward foot a trifle farther out than usual, gave his head a slight shake and his lips a slight curl. I felt instinctively that this time he meant mischief. As usual, Von H—— led off, but this time with a rattling *Hochterz* [a downward diagonal cut struck from the fencer's left] that almost broke both blades. M—— parried, and replied with a quick, strong upward cut. Von H—— had barely time to recover guard and parry. He did so, however, but unfortunately in the movement suffered his wrist to drop an inch or two. In a twinkling, apparently as if it were the same motion, M——'s upward cut was reversed to *Hochterz* (what would have been *Hochquart* for one right-handed). With a dull gleam and an inexpressibly rapid swish, his *Schläger* swooped upon his antagonist's exposed forehead. A

> subdued hum thrilled through the assembly. A stream of bright red blood spurted on the floor, and it needed no doctor's examination to pronounce the duel over. It had lasted five or six minutes, and the victor had struck only one real blow. One may attend many a duel without witnessing a like display of tactics. The successful duellist had simply kept his guard and struck in the nick of time. . . .
>
> In ninety-nine instances out of the hundred, a student duel is like the two that I have described: either a harmless and almost farcical set-to between men who cannot do each other much harm, or a scientific trial of skill between veterans who know how to give and take. I once asked a friend of mine, a corps-student at the time and a splendid *Schläger*, what he really thought of the *Mensur*. "Oh," said he, "it is an abominable piece of nonsense (*ein grässlicher Unsinn*), but at any rate it is better than street-fighting."[14]

Wythe Williams, a journalist with a particular interest in fencing, witnessed a morning of clandestine Mensuren in 1930, three years after the Weimar Republic had banned the practice. After a series of routine bouts, he witnessed a "hate" duel between a lawyer and an army captain, who fought over an undisclosed but reportedly grave provocation. As a well-scarred *alter Herr* (old graduate) informed him, "Even hate duels nowadays usually are conducted under student auspices, on account of the 'unwarranted activity' of the police. The students . . . are far more adept at staging these duels than their elders."

The duel was fought with the *Säbel* (curved saber). The lawyer and the captain wore fighting britches, protective aprons, gauntlets, forearm protection, eye goggles and neck guards, but had bare chests and shoulders. After positioning them a sword's length apart and crossing their blades, their seconds took their places perpendicular to them and crossed their own blades beneath theirs. At the command, the seconds stepped back and the swordplay began. After eight cuts a break was called, though no blood had been spilled. In the next eight-cut round, the lawyer broke down the captain's guard and nearly cut off his right ear. The captain wished to continue the duel, and the doctor, after examining him, declared that he was fit to do so. In the third round the captain laid open the lawyer's cheek, but still both men wished to proceed.

> The next encounter, however, was the final one and settled all matters—honor included apparently—for otherwise it appeared that these furious warriors might pass eternally to a happier hunting ground. The attorney again caught the captain—this time on the top of his skull, causing a deep gash—but, almost at the same instant, the captain's blade bit into the attorney's shoulder with such effect that the sword dropped from a hand that had suddenly gone weak.[15]

Both men had lost so much blood that they could hardly stand and had to be helped to the doctor's station.

In 1933, shortly after coming to power, the Nazi Party legalized student dueling, a practice with which several of its high-ranking members were personally familiar. As a student Heinrich Himmler had been anxious to prove himself in a Mensur but struggled to reconcile the practice with his Catholic faith. As was so often the case, the demands of religion lost out to those of honor, and the future SS Reichsführer dueled in his last semester, in June 1922. He was proud of his performance, writing in his diary, "I did not get at all excited. I stood very well and technically fought very nicely. My opponent was Mr. Renner of the Alemanians." Himmler was disabled in the 13th of 50 rounds. "As it later turned out I received five bloody blows . . . five stitches, one ligature. I truly did not flinch, even once," he noted with satisfaction.[16]

SS Sturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny, Hitler's bodyguard and head of Germany's commando operations, carried a large scar on his left cheek from his student days. He had dueled 15 times and had never been known to turn down a fight. "I was often grateful for the self-discipline we learned in our student club," he said later. "I never felt under more pressure than I did at eighteen when I had to fight my first duel under the eyes of my fellow students. My knowledge of pain, learned with the saber, taught me not to be afraid. And just as in dueling when you must concentrate on your enemy's cheek, so, too, in war. You cannot waste time on feinting and sidestepping. You must decide on your target and go in."[17]

In 1937, however, the Nazis outlawed student dueling, a ban that continued under the Occupation. However, in the 1950s the Criminal Section of the Federal Appellate Court decriminalized the Mensur, reasoning that it was not fought with deadly weapons. Fencing scholar J. Christoph Amberger participated in seven while a student at Göttingen in 1987, and carries the resulting scar on his cheek. He describes the experience vividly in *The Secret History of the Sword*.

One of the Mensur's most prominent defenders was Kaiser Wilhelm, who, addressing a students' meeting in Bonn in 1891, said:

> I hope that as long as there are German corps students, the spirit which is fostered in their corps, and which is steeled by strength and courage, will be preserved, and that you will always take delight in the *Schläger*. There are many people who do not understand what our *Mensuren* really mean, but that must not lead us astray. You and I who have been corps students know better than that. As in the middle ages manly strength and courage were steeled by the prac-

> tice of jousting or tournaments, so the spirit and habits which are acquired from membership of a corps furnish us with the degree of fortitude which is necessary to us when we go out into the world, and which will last as long as there are German universities.[18]

NOTES

1. Theodore Child, "Impressions of Berlin," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 81 (August 1890): 350.
2. Mark Twain, *A Tramp Abroad* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906) 1: 56. Twain, who witnessed a day of 10 Mensuren, provided a vivid description of them.
3. "German Duelling," *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine* 40 (April 1834): 470.
4. "Schlagerei," *Saturday Review*, 748.
5. Spadroon: A double-edged cut-and-thrust sword.
6. "Schlagerei," *Saturday Review*, 749.
7. Walter C. Perry, *German University Education* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845): 136–137.
8. "Schlagerei," 749.
9. For a detailed article on the evolution of the Mensur, see J. Christoph Amberger's "Time and Space: The Intellectual Foundations of German Schlägerplay," available online at http://swordhistory.com.
10. William Howitt, *The Student Life of Germany* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1862): 138.
11. James Morgan Hart, *German Universities: A Narrative of Personal Experiences* (New York: Putnam, 1874): 164.
12. Gordon Bolitho, *The Other Germany* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1934): 157.
13. Ibid., 15.
14. Hart, *German Universities,* 70–79.
15. Wythe Williams, "Kulture of the Saber," *Saturday Evening Post* 202 (April 26, 1930): 194.
16. Peter Loewenberg, "The Unsuccessful Adolescence of Heinrich Himmler," *American Historical Review* 76 (June 1971): 633–634.

17. Glenn B. Infield, *Skorzeny: Hitler's Commando* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981): 12.
18. "German Students and Their Absurd Duels," *Cosmopolitan* 22 (January 1897): 234.

48

WESTERN SHOWDOWN VS. THE DUEL

One of popular culture's most enduring images is the Western showdown. Two men face off in the main street of some dusty cow town, their hands poised over holstered revolvers. Townsfolk peer out nervously from windows and doorways. The gunfighters exchange hard looks, and their trigger fingers twitch as each waits for the other to make the first move. Tension builds until one of them goes for his weapon; the other immediately then draws his own. They shoot from the hip, and one man slumps to the ground.

Any student of history knows that such scenes were almost unheard of. The usual practice in an Old West gunfight was for the challenger to tell his opponent something like "the next time I see you, you'd better be armed." Then, as long as neither was shot in the back and no respectable citizens were cut down in a crossfire, any subsequent killing would generally be ruled justifiable homicide. In 1906, Englishman Morley Roberts compared the European style of dueling unfavorably with that of the American West:

> I haven't any sympathy whatever with the practice of duelling as it is carried out by European civilised races. In the first place, it is unsatisfactory to have other men in the business, called, I believe, seconds, who do all they can to prevent any real business. Then if you kill your opponent there is a deal of legal trouble. But, of course, you don't want to kill him, as a rule, and there is no reality in the affair. If I want to kill anyone, I want to do it badly, and I don't want to get killed. The American way is the best. You send a man word you will shoot him on sight, and you take a shotgun or .45 caliber Colt's Frontier pistol, or a seventeen-shot Winchester, and look for him, thus combining satisfaction with the pleasures of the chase. And these weapons kill while the crowd lies down or gets round the corner, instead of interfering. I really mean this: I am not trying to be newly humorous, or even funny. There is nothing ridiculous in really trying to kill a man, but the Continental duel is merely a Bois de Boulogne farce.[1]

Ulysses S. Grant made a similar observation in his memoir: "If any man should wrong me to the extent of my being willing to kill him, I would not be willing to give him the choice of weapons with which it should be done, and of the time, place and distance separating us, when I executed him."[2]

So where did the image of the classic showdown, fought fair and square, come from? First, probably, from the gushing feature on Wild Bill Hickok published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1867. Two years earlier, Hickok had had a showdown in the town square of Springfield, Missouri, in which he killed Dave Tutt with one pistol shot at a distance of 75 yards, one of the only such occurrences on record. Hickok set the pattern for the chivalric Western gunfighters who populated the dime novels of Ned Buntline and were further enhanced in

The classic showdown, a scene known only in Hollywood. Provided by Movie Still Archives.

Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902). Since the duel represented the ideal of a fair fight, the creators of Western fiction simply transplanted it to their chosen milieu. It would never have occurred to a Western gunfighter to leave his pistol in its holster when he saw a fight coming—this is clearly homage to the traditional duel in which principals held their pistols pointed at the ground as they waited for the command to fire. The fanciful notion of the hero shooting the gun out of his opponent's hand, a common sight in TV Westerns of the 1950s, has no roots in gunfighting but is an adaptation of the swordsman's disarm.

An obvious difference between the duel and the gunfight is the absence of seconds in the latter. In the Western mythos, their involvement would detract from the image of the hero as autonomous agent of justice.

James Pemberton Grund described a "duel" on the frontier that illustrated how brutal the reality often was:

> Colonel Robert Alexander, a Scotch Canadian who served with credit in the Confederate army, superseded some years ago the man in charge of a tin mine in the Ozark Mountains, not far

> from Hot Springs in Arkansas. The man swore to shoot Alexander "on sight." When this was reported to the latter he put a pistol in his pocket and rode straight to Hot Springs, where the man was stopping, to give him a chance to carry out his threat. They met in front of a barber's shop. Alexander fired but missed. The other had two pistols and fired nine shots. One bullet went through Alexander's throat so that his breathing was but a succession of hiccoughs, each one followed by a jet of blood that spurted from his mouth. Another bullet struck his thigh, a third disabled his left hand, while a fourth struck the right so that the little finger and the one next to it were paralyzed. The pistol he still clutched with the thumb and the two uninjured fingers of his right hand was not a self-cocker, and in his crippled condition he was at a loss how to draw the hammer back. Putting his arm around a pole before the shop he steadied himself, so that by bending his knee he could cock the pistol on the heel of his boot. At that moment his enemy, who had retired behind the angle of the house to wait in safety until he bled to death, incautiously put out his head. Alexander put a bullet through it.[3]

Alexander was carried home to die, but he ultimately recovered from his wounds.

NOTES

1. "Duels and Duelling," 217.
2. Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York: Library of America, 1990): 44.
3. Grund, "Duelling in the United States," 203.

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The Bowie Knife Duel

Dueling was not common in the United States until the Revolution, by which time swords were no longer part of the gentleman's attire, and they figured in only a handful of American encounters outside New Orleans. However in 1827 America got an *arme blanche* distinctly its own when James Bowie's performance at the Battle of the Sandbar became the stuff of legend. As the fame of the encounter spread, so did the vogue for his weapon.

The classic bowie had a wide, heavy blade about 12 inches long, of clip-point design, with a sharpened false edge, and was fitted with a cross guard. With its point aligned along its centerline, it was effective for thrusting as well as cutting. It was fitted with a crossguard to catch an opponent's blade, as well as to keep the user's hand from slipping onto his own. In contrast to the single-shot pistols of the time, the bowie was more reliable, faster to get into action, and at least as deadly at arm's length. It was worn on the belt, in the boot, or in a harness slung between the shoulder blades, the manner reportedly favored by Bowie himself.

Instruction in bowie knife technique was available in New Orleans from fencing masters such as Pepe Llulla, and it is said that there were training manuals available, including one written by the abolitionist and veteran knife fighter Cassius Marcellus Clay, but if so, none have been preserved.

The bowie knife figured in many impromptu affrays, but it made an inappropriate weapon for a proper duel. As the Texas Supreme Court pointed out in an 1859 ruling:

> It is difficult to defend against it, by any degree of bravery, or any amount of skill. The gun or pistol may miss its aim, and when discharged, its dangerous character is lost, or diminished at least. The sword may be parried. With these weapons men fight for the sake of the combat, to satisfy the laws of honor, not necessarily with the intention to kill, or with a certainty of killing, when the intention exists. The Bowie-knife differs from these in its device and design; it is an instrument of almost certain death.[1]

The accounts we have of bowie knife duels reinforce its brutal image. This one dates from the late 1830s in feud-ridden Shelby County, Texas:

> Henry [Strickland, "the bully of the Teneha"] was cut to pieces in a bowie duel with Riproaring Jim Forsyth . . . Forsyth is a very resolute man. He . . . walked into a ring with Henry Strickland, both having knives. All hands were asked if they were ready, and both answered "ready."
>
> "Then turn loose" was the word given and neither flinched. They swung forward and both struck a chopping lick as their hands met. Forsyth struck Strickland's right a little above the knuckles, cleaned all the flesh off of four fingers clear to the bone and

> lodged against his knuckles. Strickland's knife fell and he was at the mercy of Forsyth who only hacked Strickland on his arms, cleaving the flesh to the elbow on both arms. . . . He struck him . . . with a downward lick, calling it trimming his marble. . . . Strickland turned and ran, but Forsyth followed and cut his shoulder blade in two. . . . He then let him go, declaring that Henry was in good condition to behave himself and repent of his evil ways. . . . I thought that a generous act on Forsyth's part. . . . Forsyth told me he could have killed him but only wanted to cripple him in order to make a pious man out of a rogue, a sponger, a horse thief, and a peace disturber.[2]

The *Times* published this report in 1866:

> A correspondent at Columbia, Arkansas, sends us an account of a tragic affair which occurred near that place on the 28th of February. One Major Ned Burns, formerly a member of the rebel General John Morgan's command, and a Colonel Twyman, also an officer in the Confederate army, had some personal difficulty, which ended in a duel. The place selected for the spot was Point Chicot, a secluded spot upon the Mississippi River. The weapons used were bowie knives, and the duel was nothing more nor less than savage butchery. Major Burns was wounded in the arm, and Colonel Twyman received three wounds in the body, which are thought to be mortal. The latter was also severely injured in the face, his nose being completely severed, and one of his eyes so injured as greatly to impair, if not entirely destroy, his sight. The colonel's second was slightly wounded by a thrust from Major Burns. We understand that all the parties to this outrageous and disgraceful proceeding reside in Mississippi.[3]

Such affrays were commonly referred to as "Mexican" duels, the knife being the weapon of choice of the Mexican peasantry. One afternoon in March 1848, Lt. Henry Augustus Wise was in the busy central plaza in Mazatlán when he observed the following:

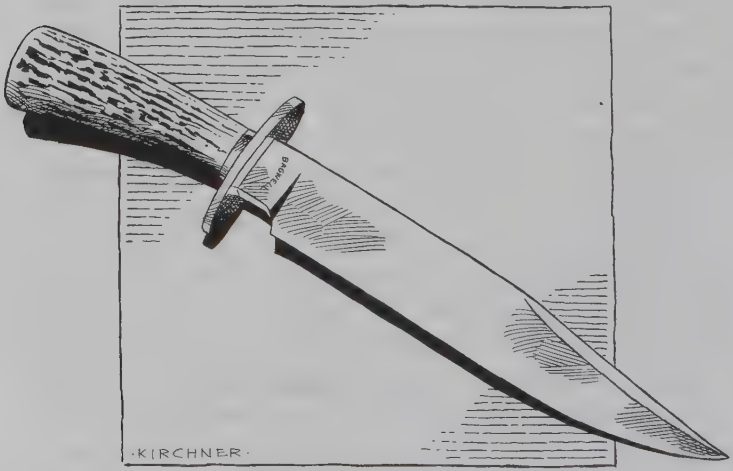
> A *lepero* [vagrant] was purchasing a bit of chocolate; it fell into the dirt, when another, probably thinking it a lawful prize, seized it and took a large bite; whereupon the lawful owner swung a mass of heavy steel spurs attached to his wrist, jingling, with some force, on the offender's head. In a second down dropped the spurs, and *serapes* were wound round the left arms. With low deep curses and flashing eyes, their knives gleamed in the light; the spectators cleared a ring, and to work they went. I sprang upon a stone pillar to be out of harm's way, and`thus had a clear view of the fray. Their blades were very unequally matched: one was at least eight inches, and the other not half that measurement; but both appeared adepts at the game—watching each other like wild cats, ready for a spring—moving cautiously to and fro, making feints by the shielded arm, or stamp of the foot, for a minute or two; when, quick as a flash, I saw two rapid passes made by both: blood spurted from an ugly wound in the spur-venders throat, but at the same moment his short weapon sealed the doom of his antagonist, and he lay upon the ground, lifeless as the bloody steel that struck him. I glanced at the wounds after the affair had terminated, and found the knife had been plunged twice directly in the region of the heart. There was no effort or attempt made by the beholders to arrest the parties; and the survivor caught up his spurs—a bystander quickly folded a handsome

> kerchief to his neck—and threading the crowd he was soon out of sight.[4]

Perhaps the most famous bowie knife duel in history occurred in Little Rock, Arkansas, on December 4, 1837, during one of the first legislative sessions held at the Old State House. John Wilson, a wealthy plantation owner and president of the scandal-plagued Real Estate Bank, had been elected speaker of the house.

The topic under discussion was the bounty paid for wolf pelts. At $10, it was a considerable sum, and there had been a recent case in which a man, described as a recently arrived Yankee, had been caught raising wolves in order to profit from it. To prevent such chicanery in the future, it was recommended by Rep. Brown C. Roberts "that each certificate of a genuine wolf-scalp be based on not less than four affidavits, and be signed by at least four Justices, and one Judge of the Circuit."

Maj. Joseph J. Anthony, the representative from Randolph



Knifemaker Bill Bagwell's modern re-creation of the classic bowie.

County, stood up and called out, “And by the President of the Real Estate Bank!”

This joke, intended to poke fun at the overcomplication of the bill, got a general laugh, but Wilson assumed the reference was to the Real Estate Bank’s sullied reputation. He ordered Anthony to sit down, and Anthony refused.

“Sit down!” Wilson commanded.

“I am entitled to the floor, and will not resign it,” replied Anthony.

“I’ll make you sit down,” said Wilson. He drew a bowie knife and began advancing on Anthony, who stood some 40 feet away. Anthony drew his own knife from his vest. Some 60 representatives and more than a hundred onlookers sat transfixed by the tableau.

Anthony was several inches taller than the five-foot eight-inch Wilson and had the advantage of reach. He slashed twice, the second blow striking Wilson’s forearm and cutting it severely. Wilson switched his knife to his left hand and, for an instant, ran several steps backward, as if to call off the fight. Anthony then made a fatal mistake—he threw his knife at his opponent. Wilson ducked, and it clattered across the floor.

Wilson again rushed forward. Anthony threw a chair at Wilson and then picked up another with which to try to fend him off. Rep. Grandison Royston tried to separate the men but was brushed aside. Wilson ducked under the chair and ripped Anthony open from pelvis to sternum.

“I’m a dead man,” Anthony said as he grabbed his spilling intestines and fell to the floor. One account says that Wilson stood over his body and calmly observed, “It is not the first time he has insulted me,” before walking back to the speaker’s desk. Another account was that he sank down beside Anthony, faint from loss of blood, but had the presence of mind to wipe his blade clean on his victim’s coat before losing consciousness.

The whole encounter had lasted about 20 seconds.

Wilson was arrested and expelled from the House. Royston, who had tried to break up the fight, was elected the new speaker. Wilson was tried in May 1838 and acquitted on the grounds of "excusable homicide." Upon hearing the verdict, Wilson stood up in court and invited everyone out for drinks.

Wilson was elected to the Arkansas House from a different district in 1842, and shortly after his return he again pulled a knife on an opponent during a debate. This time he was quickly subdued by the other representatives. He was summoned to the bar of the House and reprimanded by the speaker, but other than that nothing came of the incident.

NOTES

1. Clayton E. Cramer, *Concealed Weapon Laws of the Early Republic: Dueling, Southern Violence, and Moral Reform* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999): 88.
2. William Ransom Hogan, "Rampant Individualism in the Republic of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 44 (April 1941): 465–466.
3. "Savage Duel," *Times* (London), April 6, 1866, p. 3, col. 6.
4. Lt. Henry Augustus Wise, *Los Gringos, or An Inside View of Mexico and California* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849): 239.

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THE "AMERICAN" DUEL

In central Europe, in the latter half of the 19th century, a morbid ritual developed for the resolution of disputes of honor: principals did not face off in a duel, but chose lots, the loser agreeing to kill himself. Reportedly, a number of supposed suicides in this period were in fact the results of such pacts, dubbed "American" duels.

An account of one such duel was published in 1861:

> A letter from Warsaw, in the *Précurseur d'Anvers*, gives the following strange account of the death of General Gerstenzweig:
>
> The General, partly from obedience to orders, partly from natural severity of disposition, had arrested a great many Poles, and had placed them in the citadel. Shortly after fears were entertained that an insurrection would break out, and that consequently numerous prisoners in the citadel would be an embarrassment. Accordingly, the commander of the fortress, in conjunction with Count Lambert,

> ordered several of them to be released. On hearing this, General Gerstenzweig went in a state of great irritation to Count Lambert, reproached him with having acted from fear, and called him a coward. As several officers of the staff were present, a duel seemed inevitable; but, as a hostile meeting between two such high personages at that moment might present great inconveniences, it was decided that one of the two should kill himself the same evening, and that lots should be drawn to decide which it should be. The lot fell on General Gerstenzweig, and he fired three times with pistols at his head, the last time inflicting a mortal wound. These incidents explain why General Lambert shortly after left suddenly for St. Petersburg.[1]

Another such incident was reported in 1864:

> A tragical event has just taken place at Heidelberg. Late in the evening of the 15th a student belonging to the body of the Swabians [a student fraternity] was found lying on the ground weltering in his blood. He had discharged a pistol in the region of his heart, but the ball, having been turned aside by touching a rib, missed the heart, passed through the lungs, and lodged under the right shoulder blade, whence it was afterwards extracted. At first the natural belief was that voluntary suicide had been intended, but some letters which had been written by the student showed that he had been the victim of a shameful kind of duel. A foreign student had been grossly insulted by the Swabian, and satisfaction was demanded; but, instead of fighting in the usual way, an agreement was come to to draw lots which of the two should destroy himself within a

> delay of a fortnight. The lot fell on the Swabian. When the time was about to expire, the young man, whose father was dangerously ill, solicited an extension of the delay, but the request was refused, and the attempt at self-destruction was consequently made. Some hopes are entertained that the wound will not prove fatal, but all the entreaties of the heads of the University and of his friends cannot extort from him a promise not to repeat the desperate act. To all their solicitations his only answer is, "I have not pledged my honor to seriously wound myself, but to put an end to my life, and I will keep my promise."[2]

In 1905, the *New York Times* editorialized on the subject:

> By some inexplicable process the Continental intellect has evolved the queer belief that when two men, having quarreled, draw lots to determine which of them shall kill himself, those men have fought an "American duel." The Berlin correspondent of a London paper gravely tells such a story, and he doesn't even deem it necessary to put his descriptive phrase in quotation marks! It seems that one Fuhleroth, a young engineer of Hamburg, fell out with an acquaintance in a restaurant over some trivial matter and, as the acquaintance was physically incapable of taking part in an "affair" of any of the ordinary kinds, they resorted to what both thought and called the American method of settling the rights and wrongs of the case. The fatal lot fell to the engineer, and by agreement he had six weeks in which to prepare for death. The first thing he did was to tell his fiancée what had happened. She, instead of endeavouring to dissuade or prevent the young man from carrying out the crazy contract, admitted that

honor was involved and announced that she, too, would die at the appointed time. The two went to England and were married, passed a brief honeymoon together, and then returned to Hamburg and killed themselves. And that is the "American duel"! . . . The double suicide in Hamburg, if it must receive a racial or national designation, was thoroughly German, but if it had not been described as "American" we would have been content to apply to it some such adjective as "silly" or "stupid."[3]

NOTES

1. "A New Mode of Duelling," *Times* (London), November 27, 1861, p. 9, col. 6.
2. "Extraordinary Duel at Heidelberg," *Times* (London), June 22, 1864, p. 11, col. 6.
3. "This 'Duel' Was 'American,'" *New York Times*, April 12, 1905, p. 8, col. 5.

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CANING

When a gentleman was insulted by one beneath his station, one with whom he would not deign to duel, he responded by beating him with a cane or horsewhip or, better still, delegating the chore to his servants. Such a humiliation befell François-Marie Arouet, the French philosopher, author, and wit better known by his nom de plume, Voltaire.

One evening in December 1726, at the Paris Opera, Voltaire, then 32, was having a spirited discussion in the lobby between acts when the chevalier de Rohan Chabot overheard him. Taking exception to Voltaire's views, Rohan broke into his conversation and demanded, "Monsieur de Voltaire . . . Monsieur Arouet . . . what *is* your name?"

Voltaire had earned his position in society not by birth, like the chevalier, but by his intelligence and wit, so it was with some impudence that he responded, "I do not trail after me a great name, but I know how to honor the name I bear."

This struck a sore spot, as there were rumors that Rohan had a sideline in loan sharking. Rohan instantly raised his cane as if to strike, and Voltaire put his hand on the hilt of his sword—both gestures considered equivalent to a blow.

A few days later Voltaire was dining at the home of his patron, the duc de Sully, when a servant whispered to him that he was wanted outside. Voltaire went to the door and saw two hackney coaches standing nearby. Two men approached him and asked him to stand on the step of the nearest carriage, implying that the person who wished to speak with him was inside. When Voltaire climbed the step he was grabbed from inside the coach and held while the first two men began caning him. From the other coach Voltaire heard Rohan call out, "Don't hit him on the head! Something good may come out of that!"

After five or six blows on the back and shoulders, Rohan said, "That's enough." Voltaire was released, and the carriages drove away. Later, Rohan would joke to friends, "I was in command of *les travailleurs* [the laborers]."

Voltaire returned to the dinner and reported the incident to his host, expecting that he would take personal offense at such an outrage against one of his guests. The duke was not so inclined, however, because Rohan was not only an aristocrat but also his cousin. Voltaire angrily left Sully's house, ending a friendship of 10 years.

Voltaire lodged a complaint against Rohan, but it came to nothing. The duc de Sully refused even to appear before a magistrate and give a deposition. Comic verses circulated about the incident, and a new verb was added to the vernacular: *voltairiser*, to voltaire, to beat. Voltaire found the indignity unbearable. According to biographer James Parton:

> He resolved to challenge Rohan to mortal combat with the sword, a weapon which he had worn for many years, and knew how to use about as well as a poet of the present time knows how to box. The equalizing pistol was not then

> employed on "the field of honor." He now abstained from his usual haunts, took lessons in fencing, and sought the advice of men learned in the art of polite combat, not suspecting that he was under the surveillance of the police. He was determined not to throw his life away by going to the field too soon, and, accordingly, he spent nearly four months in acquiring skill with his weapon.[1]

A police report of April 16, 1726, read:

> The Sieur de Voltaire intends to insult the Chevalier de Rohan immediately, and with *éclat*. Several times during the last six weeks he has changed both his residence and his quarter. We have information that he is now at the house of one Leynault, a fencing-master, [at] Rue St. Martin, where he lives in very bad company. It is said that he is in relations with some soldiers of the guards, and that several bullies [*bretteurs*] frequent his lodgings. Whatever truth there may be in these last reports, it is certain that he has very bad designs, and it is sure also that he has had one of his relations [Daumart] come from the country, who is to accompany him in the combat. This relation is a more moderate man than M. de Voltaire, and desires to calm him, but it is impossible. He is more irritated and more furious than ever in his conduct and in his conversation.[2]

On the following evening, Voltaire approached Rohan at the Théâtre Français and said, "Sir, if some affair of interest has not made you forget the outrage of which I have to complain of, I hope you will feel disposed to give me satisfaction." (The reference to interest was another gibe at Rohan's loan sharking.)

Rohan accepted the challenge, naming St-Martin's the

Porte du as the place, and nine o'clock the next morning as the time, but Voltaire was arrested that night and locked up in the Bastille. It was widely assumed that this had been done at Rohan's request, which turned public sympathy in Voltaire's favor. So many friends visited him that their numbers had to be restricted, and he dined every day at the governor's table with other favored inmates. After 15 days he was released on the condition that he go to England, where he remained three years.

Throughout the affair Voltaire said that he was seeking to repair not his own honor, but that of Rohan—only the latter proved too difficult.

The most remarkable incident of caning in the United States occurred on the floor of the Senate on May 22, 1856. Two days earlier, Sen. Charles Sumner of Massachusetts had delivered a speech in which he denounced slave owners in the harshest terms, likening them to pirates, tyrants, falsifiers, assassins, thugs, swindlers, and criminals. The speech was intentionally inflammatory; Sumner described it as his intention to make "the most thorough philippic ever uttered in a legislative body." It included a personal attack on South Carolina's senior senator, Andrew Pickens Butler, who was not present. Sumner said, "The Senator touches nothing which he does not disfigure with error, sometimes of principle, sometimes of fact. . . . He cannot open his mouth, but out there flies a blunder."

Rep. Preston S. Brooks of South Carolina, the son of a cousin of Butler, watched Sumner's speech from the gallery. Afterward he examined the printed record and discussed the matter with several colleagues, including Rep. Lawrence Keitt of South Carolina and Rep. Henry Edmundson of Virginia. A veteran duelist, Brooks gave no thought to challenging the senator, but pondered only with which weapon of dishonor he should beat him. He settled on a gutta-percha cane about an inch in diameter and topped with a gold head. He then awaited an opportunity to catch his victim alone or at least not in the presence of ladies.

On the afternoon of May 22, after an early adjournment, Sumner remained in the Senate chamber writing letters. Brooks walked up in front of his desk and said, "Mr. Sumner, I have read your speech over twice carefully; it is a libel on South Carolina and Mr. Butler, who is a relative of mine." Before he finished this sentence, though, Brooks struck Sumner on the head and proceeded to rain blows upon him hard and fast. Sumner was a large man, and his legs were trapped under the desk, which was bolted to the floor. At last Sumner tore the desk from its moorings and staggered about 10 feet up the aisle before collapsing, bloody and senseless. Even then Brooks continued to hit him, at least 20 blows in all, until the cane broke. Several representatives and senators rushed forward to stop Brooks, while others from the South watched approvingly, some calling out encouragement. Representative Keitt stood near Brooks, brandishing a cane and shouting, "Let them alone, God damn you!"

The following day the matter was taken up by the House. After a number of speeches, Brooks addressed the house "in a speech of mingled assumption, insolence, and self-conceit." Claiming to find the hearing curious, he said that it was simply "a personal affair, for which I am personally responsible." He acknowledged, "I went to work very deliberately, as I am charged . . . and speculated somewhat as to whether I should employ a horsewhip or a cowhide [bullwhip]; but, knowing that the Senator was my superior in strength, it occurred to me that he might wrest it from my hand. . . ."[3] He then implied that, had that occurred, he would have resorted to a deadly weapon he had in reserve.

The House voted on a resolution to expel Brooks, which his fellow Southerners blocked, but he resigned to avoid censure.

While the brutal attack shocked Northerners, in the South Brooks was a hero. The Richmond *Enquirer* recommended that

Sumner and his fellow abolitionists be caned every morning. Fragments of the splintered weapon were sought after like relics of the True Cross, and Brooks was swamped with canes sent him from all over the South, including one whose head was engraved with "Use Knock-Down Arguments," and another with "Hit Him Again!" One Charlestonian jocularly observed that any abolitionist who troubled South Carolinians in the future would certainly get something engraved on *his* head.

Brooks ran again for his seat and was promptly returned to the House. However, he did not enjoy his glory for long; he died on January 28, 1857, of the croup.

It would be three and a half years before Sumner recovered sufficiently to resume his full duties in the Senate.

Some have described the Brooks-Sumner incident as the first blow of the Civil War. Remarkably, Sumner did not hold his assailant personally responsible, observing that "it was slavery, not *he* that struck the blow." Years later, when he was asked how he felt about Brooks, he answered, "Only as to a brick that should fall on my head from a chimney. He was the unconscious agent of a malign power."[4]

NOTES

1. James Parton, *Life of Voltaire* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1881) 1:189.
2. Ibid.
3. Jeremiah Chaplin and J.D. Chaplin, *Life of Charles Sumner* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., 1874): 289.
4. Walter G. Shotwell, *Life of Charles Sumner* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1910): 336.

Part 4

REMARKABLE DUELISTS

52

PETER DRAKE

After their uprising against English rule was crushed in 1691, the Irish gentry who participated left their homeland by the thousands, many finding employment in the armies of Europe. These were the so-called Wild Geese, and among them was Peter Drake. Born in 1671, Drake fought in the War of the Grand Alliance (1689–1697) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1713) as a noncommissioned officer. He comes across in his memoirs as an intelligent and resourceful man, with the gentlemanly attributes of pride, courtesy, dash, and charm. Many of his superior officers took a liking to him and did him good turns throughout his career. He also did well with the ladies, whom he pursued without prejudice as to marital status. Having no patrimony, Drake kept a keen eye out for his own interest, taking every opportunity to line his pockets in ventures ranging from bankrolling gambling operations to graft to pulling the occasional con. He was jailed several times, usually escaping, but was one time held for two and a half years. Late in life he published his memoirs, which were considered so scandalous that his family attempted to destroy the entire print run. A few copies survived, however, and were reprinted in 1960 under the title *Amiable Renegade*. The memoir includes details of Drake's numerous schemes, scrapes, and seductions, as well as accounts of nine duels he fought, all of them with the smallsword.

While stationed in Dublin in 1700, he honed his skill with this weapon under a Captain Butler, whom he described as the top fencing master in the city. Drake took lessons twice daily for three months and proved himself an apt pupil. As he wrote, "The captain himself having freely owned that he got credit by me, there being several gentlemen of much longer standing who had not made half the proficiency."

Drake continued his training, and a year later, while he was stationed in Holland, he was fencing with a quartermaster in a Dutch cavalry regiment when he tore the man's coat with his buttoned blade. The quartermaster chose to resent it, asking Drake, "Do you think you could push so well with the point?"

"I cannot tell unless I try," answered Drake.

"I will try you at the first opportunity," said the quartermaster sharply.

"You seem to be angry at what was not meant to injure you," said Drake, "but if that does not give you satisfaction, you must please yourself; I will neither seek nor avoid you."

The next day, the two met outside town for a reckoning. In a double hit, Drake ran the quartermaster through the sword arm and was himself thrust through the left breast.

The year 1706 yielded a bumper crop of duels for Drake. His regiment was one of 10 occupying Tournai after it fell to siege, and he was quartered in an inn whose owner had three daughters. Drake staked out the eldest but soon discovered he had a rival in a German lieutenant. Drake was concerned that a failure to resent the lieutenant's advances might be seen as faint-heartedness on his part, and resolved to put the misperception to rest. One afternoon, finding the lieutenant sitting too close to the lady, Drake informed him that he had intentions toward her and that the lieutenant should spare himself the trouble of future visits.

"Do you know to whom you are speaking?" the lieutenant asked with a derisive laugh.

"Yes, and I'll let you know to whom *you* are," replied Drake, striking him in the face. The lieutenant put his hand to his sword, but Drake suggested they leave the town, because dueling was forbidden between troops in garrison. They walked a few miles beyond the gates and then drew. The lieutenant suggested that the first man wounded should renounce his claim on the lady. Drake agreed and immediately disarmed his opponent.

"Is that equal to first blood?" asked Drake.

"No," said the lieutenant.

"Though I have the power to draw first blood without danger, as you are disarmed, I scorn to gain the prize in so ungenerous a manner," replied Drake, returning his opponent's blade. "Now defend yourself."

The lieutenant handled himself well, and they exchanged several thrusts, until Drake wounded him slightly in the arm.

"Are you satisfied to stand to the terms, or would you proceed further?" asked Drake.

"I will contend no longer with so generous an enemy," said the lieutenant, and they returned to Tournai together, where the lady awaited them anxiously. As the surgeon bound up his arm, the lieutenant ceremoniously took her hand and delivered it to Drake. As Drake wrote, "She seemed in some degree concerned, though, in reality, she valued herself highly, for being thought an object worth contending for."[1]

Shortly afterward Drake was involved in a multiparty duel. As he described it:

> There happened a strange and unlucky adventure in the town, which I cannot omit relating. . . . Here were thirteen of us, all friends and

bottle companions, merry-making together; two of the most intimate (both officers in the same regiment) fell out, as is often the case, about a trifle next to nothing, nor could either be appeased without fighting. This humour unhappily drew in the rest, some declaring for one side, some the other. It was at last agreed, that at the opening of the gates we should walk out to decide the matter at the points of our swords; and soon after hearing the drums beat the Revallie [reveille], all began to rouse their spirits, and thought less of the dismal consequence that followed; we went towards the gate to the number of thirteen.

Here something odd, as [well as] humorous, happened, for going to the appointed place, we met one Monsieur de la Salle, a lieutenant of grenadiers, who was well acquainted with us all. He insisted on knowing our destination, and what we were about, which being told, and observing there were but thirteen, said the party was unequal, that there must be seven to six, or somebody go home, which he swore he would prevent, by making one to produce an equality; that he could not, nor would [not], see so many of his friends engaged in a cause of honour and be an idle spectator. Thus this whimsical gentleman, instead of endeavouring to soften matters, added fuel to the fire.

As we were approaching the place of action, some proposed to the two principals to put an end to the dispute; and I was at the same time speaking to La Salle (the last comer) on the same subject, who laughed heartily, and with a loud voice, cried out, *Puisque le vin est tiré il faut le boire*, that is, *Since the wine is drawn, it must be drank*; to which I answered, if it must be so, he and I must touch glasses together; to which he cheerfully agreed, at the same time embracing me.

> By this time we reached the fatal place, where an accommodation was proposed again, but in vain. Upon which we drew up in two ranks, seven against seven; and it was agreed that La Salle should give the word to draw, which he did cheerfully and audibly. The fight began, every man tilting at his opponent, and the two principals engaged; and in a short time killed each other. There was another lost on the part for which I fought, and some wounded on both sides; and I had the good fortune to wound and disarm Monsieur de la Salle. Thus ended this unChristian and bloody skirmish, to the shame, scandal and confusion of all those who were unthinkingly concerned.[2]

Drake and three other participants fled to Lille to wait and see how this duel *en masse* would be officially regarded. After some time they learned that it had not been taken terribly seriously, "having been considered only as the result of drunkenness."

In late 1706 Drake decided to switch sides, which was not particularly unusual among the Wild Geese, who felt no particular loyalty to the British crown. He accepted a commission on a French privateering vessel, and a few days before she was to set sail had what he described as "an unlucky accident" at Tournai:

> I went into a tavern kept by a man who had three years before been a sergeant in the same regiment with me, to take a glass and a farewell before I embarked. Here I unfortunately met by chance a woman who had more beauty than virtue, with whom I began to frolick. In the midst of our dalliance, there entered a smart young officer, who seemed much out of humor at our freedoms, and at

once bid me to unhand the lady, or he would oblige me. I civilly asked him if she was his wife or sister? He answered me, neither, hitting me a sharp slap on the cheek: upon which I tripped up his heels, which struck his head against the stones. The landlord and the rest of the company hearing the noise, came in and prevented further mischief for the present; however, we had sufficient opportunity of speaking, and appointed to meet next morning at eight o'clock on the parade, to decide this difference.

He had not patience to wait the time; for at seven he came to my lodging, knocked at my chamber door, and asked if I was asleep. I answered that I was up and dressed, and expressed my concern that he gave himself the trouble of coming, for I intended a most punctual observance of time and place, but that the hour was not as yet come. That is true, said he, but that inasmuch as men often forget what they promise over night, he came to rub up my memory. I thanked [him], and told him mine was very good.

So we walked out, in order to wait the opening of the gates; when he asked which we should go out at, I said it was indifferent to me; but, however, I named one. He objected, from a possibility of my having some ill design in it, which gave me a very bad opinion of him; then he nominated one in his turn, and I refused for the reason before alleged. At last, the point being settled to the satisfaction of both, we pitched upon a convenient place, where having made several passes at each other, he retired a little, and in his retreat fell against a small sand hill. I put my sword under my arm and bid him rise; we engaged a second time and I soon disarmed him, promising, however, notwithstanding his behaviour, to restore his sword in town, where the dispute began, if he

> thought proper to meet me there. He earnestly entreated that I would not expose him, offering to ask pardon publickly, if I required it, or give me any other satisfaction I should desire.
>
> As he was an officer, I was unwilling to expose him, so returned him his weapon and we walked in seeming friendship together until we came in sight of the sentinels; when all on a sudden, whilst I turned my head, he drew, which I fortunately perceived and flew back before he had time to make his thrust: I drew also, and made at him, resolving to have his life as a punishment for his perfidy, or die in the attempt; so attacked him with uncommon fury, and in a short time ran him through the body. This done, I made all imaginable haste to town, went to my captain, and told him what had happened, who advised me to take boat and go directly on board.[3]

The body of the officer was discovered, but since the authorities had no idea who was responsible, Drake escaped scot-free. He was not so lucky with his privateering adventure, however: on his maiden voyage he was captured by the English, imprisoned as a traitor, and sentenced to death. His brother used his influence at court to get him pardoned after he had served two and a half years. Perversely, Drake immediately made his way back to the French side, and on September 9–11, 1709, fought at Malplaquet, one of the bloodiest battles of the War of the Spanish Succession. He was completely disabled with seven wounds from sword and musket and was forced to surrender. He was released to his own side on parole—his word that he would not return to battle until terms were negotiated for prisoners—and was true to it.

In 1711 Drake fought with a close friend, a Sergeant Farrell, after a minor dispute. After giving Farrell a slight wound in the belly, Drake brought him home to his wife. "I mention this," Drake wrote, "to shew my reader how inconsiderately men often expose their lives for trifles, especially when spurred on by immoderate drinking."[4]

In March 1712, while gambling in a tavern in Harwich, Drake got into an argument with a trooper named Collister. When Collister accused him of lying, Drake cracked him on the head with a stick, and the two had to be separated. Collister told him he had not done with him yet, and two days later confronted him as he was out walking. They drew their swords.

> We had several good thrusts at each other; at last, thinking I had a good opportunity, I made a full thrust at him, when he, at the same instant, altered his position, making a thrust in secoon [seconde], as the masters call it, and received the thrust I intended at his body under his eye, through the cheek, which came out under the tip of his ear. . . . He said he was satisfied; I answered, so was I; then bid him deliver his sword, which he did. I went to him, and tied his handkerchief to mine, to stop the blood, then I went with him to a surgeon, had him dressed, and parted good friends, never quarreling with him after. This made noise enough, and was the chief subject talked of among the military gentlemen for some days.[5]

In 1714, Drake had an encounter with James Miller, a horse grenadier who had achieved considerable success in sword fighting professionally at venues such as London's Bear Garden, and who later wrote *Treatise on the Broadsword* (1737).[6] Drake was Miller's invited guest at a gathering of officers drinking at a pub, but Miller played a practical joke on him by secretly blackening the tip of his nose with soot. When, after some time, Drake was let in on the joke, he declared that whoever had pulled the prank was a rascal and a scoundrel. Miller responded by striking at him with his walking stick, but he was restrained by the other officers. Drake said he was content to let the matter rest, but Miller kept bringing it up throughout the evening, until Drake took him aside and suggested they meet outside as soon as it stopped raining.

At dawn the following morning the revelers lay about the room, some snoring in corners, others passed out in chairs. The weather had cleared, and as Drake wrote:

> Finding this favorable opportunity, I walked close by Mr. Miller, then trod upon his foot (the signal agreed upon) and went to the walk. I had no sooner got to the upper end, and sat down in an alcove, than he appeared at the other; when he saw me (tho' the whole length of the walk was between us) he clapped his hand to his sword and came in that posture within ten or twelve yards of me. I immediately drew, and we both attacked smartly; he gave ground almost as fast as he came up. In this retreat he received two slight wounds, or rather scratches, in his sword arm; he got behind one of the trees and begged I would let him breathe. I said, "Though you deserve no favour, I would scorn to take the advantage." I put my sword under my arm, bidding him to draw breath. At about this time being missed, four of the gentlemen came, and found us in this posture, which prevented our going to it again, so we parted for that time, and all went to their respective homes. This duel was talked of for some time, especially among the military gentlemen; it also gained me some reputation for having engaged one of the principal heroes of the stage.[7]

For days after the interrupted duel the two men tried to arrange another meeting, while their friends tried to mediate the matter. At last Drake and Miller agreed to meet at a pub with the same officers who had witnessed the offense and let them adjudicate it, the loser to pay a guinea fine. Miller lost. He cheerfully submitted, paid his fine, and embraced Drake in reconciliation.

Drake had a near duel about a year later with an English officer, Captain Hardyman, who was notorious for his hatred of the Irish, whom he claimed he could identify by smell. Drake was at a pub when Hardyman entered and declared, "Damn me, I smell an Irishman!"

"Now the game begins," muttered an English officer near Drake.

Hardyman repeated his declaration a few minutes later. Looking around, Drake concluded that he was the only Irishman present and decided that if Hardyman spoke up again he would show his resentment.

Hardyman did not keep him waiting long, and when he shouted, "Damn my blood, I smell the rank smell of an Irishman!" Drake ordered a fresh pint of ale, walked over to him, identified himself as an Irishman, flung it in his face, and then returned to his seat and ordered another pint. Drake remained for another half hour, but Hardyman had nothing more to say.

Drake later encountered Hardyman at a restaurant. "Whether the captain had lost the faculty of smelling, had forgot me, or was, like a good Christian, willing to forgive, I cannot tell, but there was not one word mentioned about our former affair."

This was not the only duel Drake tried unsuccessfully to provoke. On another occasion, when he learned that a friend named Jessop had been maligning him behind his back, he invited him out for a walk and confronted him when they were alone. Jessop denied the charge, which infuriated Drake. Both men were wearing swords and carrying walking sticks. Drake struck Jessop with his stick, but Jessop did not rise to the challenge. Drake wrote, “I struck him again, swearing, if he would not draw, I would give him a good beating; but, coward like, he chose a severe drubbing rather than be man enough to draw his sword.”[8]

Drake fought his last duel long after he had retired from the army. He was 55 years old and running a gambling house in Bath when, in March 1726, he had trouble with a patron named Carford. Drake collared him and was escorting him toward the door when Carford drew his sword. Drake and his doorman quickly disarmed him, but offered to return the sword if he would leave. Carford agreed on the condition that Drake come out and have a drink with him. Knowing that Carford wanted to fight, Drake answered that he would not go for a drink, but that he would take a boat across the river and Carford was welcome to accompany him. Drake then picked up his own sword and returned Carford’s.

As soon as they had crossed the river, and in the presence of a number of witnesses, Carford drew and told Drake to do likewise.

“What do you mean? I have no quarrel with you!” replied Drake loudly, seeking to establish his innocence before the witnesses should he end up killing Carford. Drake began walking up a narrow road and Carford followed, his sword still drawn.

“Put up your sword and walk to Pott house; there’s a green there where we can adjust this matter without so many witnesses,” said Drake, *sotto voce*, but the crowd followed closely, smelling blood. Reaching the green, Drake removed his coat, drew, and crossed blades with Carford. He wrote:

> He was but an indifferent swordsman, and left-handed, which a little puzzled me at first, but I soon got over it.[9] I gave him a slight wound in the left shoulder, and may say (without vanity) I might easily have dispatched him, had I been as bloody-minded as he proved. However, I gave him

> another touch in the left wrist, then ask'd him if he was satisfied; he swore he was not, nor would be, until he had my life, or lose his in the attempt. He was a clever, active man, which did him some service on this occasion, for on hearing these words, I made a full thrust at his body. I thought I had done his business, but he fortunately escaped the danger by a sudden and seasonable spring backward. Nevertheless, the point penetrated his clothes and shirt to his skin.[10]

Drake's advantage ended with the sudden arrival of a group of men who had followed from the gambling club. They began battering down the swords of the duelists with their own, and, while Carford managed to hold onto his weapon, Drake's was knocked from his grasp. Seeing him disarmed, Carford lunged and Drake sprang back. No one interfered with Carford as he advanced. Drake retreated 10 or 12 paces through the crowd of onlookers until he was stopped by a fence. As the crowd milled around Drake, hemming him in, Carford suddenly shortened his sword and, thrusting downward over a man's shoulder, stabbed Drake in the throat. As blood jetted from the wound, cries of "Murderer! Murderer!" arose from the crowd, and Carford was wrestled to the ground. A surgeon later told Drake that had the wound been a quarter of an inch deeper it would have likely been fatal. Nevertheless, he recovered fully within two months and declined to press charges.

Whether the outcome of the affair sobered Drake or it dawned on him that he was becoming a bit old for scuffles, he does not say, but this was his last duel. He died at 82 in 1753.

NOTES

1. Peter Drake, *Amiable Renegade: The Memoirs of Capt. Peter Drake, 1671–1753* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960): 81.
2. Ibid., 82–83.

3. Ibid., 88–89.
4. Ibid., 228.
5. Ibid., 286–287.
6. Miller is mentioned in Alfred Hutton, *The Sword and the Centuries,* 186, 305–308; and in Amberger, *Secret History of the Sword*, 187–189.
7. Drake, *Amiable Renegade,* 326.
8. Ibid., 280.
9. Many fencers were intimidated by the left-handed fencer, whose style was a mirror image of their own. Right-handers were accustomed to fighting other right-handers while left-handers were also accustomed to fighting right-handers, so the left-hander had the advantage of experience.
10. Ibid., 365–366.

53

ALEXANDER KEITH McCLUNG

Though he was a nephew of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, Alexander Keith McClung had anything but the judicial temperament. His dark moods, skill at arms, and readiness to defend his honor earned him the sobriquet the "Black Knight of the South."

He was born in Macon County, Kentucky, in 1811 and ran away from home at age 14. In April 1828 he appeared at the Brooklyn Navy Yard with a warrant as midshipman. While awaiting orders to ship out, he shared a room and bed (as was then customary) at a boarding house with fellow Kentuckian and midshipman Benjamin Sands, later a distinguished rear admiral.

"I remember," wrote Sands, "his accusing me one night of taking his side of the bed, and he drew my sword from its scabbard to force me to move, when, seeing that he had not scared me, he sheathed it with a laugh, saying that he really believed he would have run me through the body if I had seemed at all nervous, or made any demonstration towards him."[1]

Sands, who shipped out with McClung, described him as a "wild, *harum-scarum* kind of a fellow" and a "regular fire-eater" who "entered the service under the impression that to make a good record in the navy it was necessary to fight one's way through it."

McClung's first real duel was with Midshipman Addison C. Hinton at Montevideo, Uruguay. They managed to steal ashore early one morning on the market boat, exchange shots beneath the city walls, and return to the ship in the same boat. Hinton had been hit in the right thumb, while McClung had received a painful flesh wound in the right arm. The ball entered just above his wrist and was extracted from under the skin between the elbow and shoulder.

As a result of his disabling wound, McClung was unable to fight another duel he had scheduled, with Midshipman J.T. Williams. Moreover, the captain, having had enough of McClung's combativeness, transferred him to a homebound ship at Rio de Janeiro with an order to resign from the service once he arrived, which he did in August 1829.

McClung returned to Kentucky where, the same year, he accepted a challenge from his cousin James W. Marshall to duel with pistols at 10 paces. McClung allowed his cousin to fire first; when the latter missed, McClung fired his pistol into the air. Marshall took this as an insult and insisted that McClung agree to a second fire. McClung refused. Marshall was livid, but the duel was terminated by the seconds.

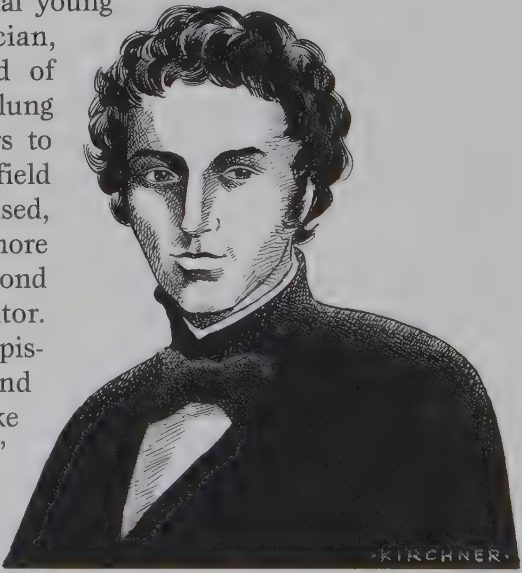
McClung studied law and set up his legal practice in Vicksburg, Mississippi. He developed a reputation as an orator and became active in the Whig Party.

Anson De Puy van Buren provided a description of McClung at this time:

> Being of dissipated habits—he both drank and gambled—he never attained a very high distinction at the bar. But his splendid intellect, and great powers as a speaker, and highly cultivated

> mind with his knightly bearing, secured for him a circle of admiring friends—especially among the Whigs. . . . He had the [comportment] and air of one who seemed to expect and demand homage of those among whom he moved. He was of splendid form, about six feet high, and admirably well proportioned; just such a model as Rome would have chosen for her gladiatorial exhibitions. He had a large head with . . . thick, curly, light, sandy hair, locks which he would twist, like a girl, with the fingers of his right hand when wholly immersed in thought.
>
> He was of a stern, morose, and overbearing temper, which doubtless was the chief cause of the difficulties which resulted in the fatal duels that he fought.[2]

In October 1833 McClung served as second to Gen. Henry S. Foote, later governor of Mississippi, in his duel with Sergeant Smith Prentiss. General Allen, a popular and influential young lawyer and politician, attended as a friend of Prentiss. When McClung ordered the spectators to clear away from the field of honor, Allen refused, considering himself more in the nature of a second than a spectator. McClung shoved his pistol against Allen and shouted, "Get back like everybody else!" Allen resented the insult but gave way. Later he publicly



vilified McClung as "a liar, scoundrel, and fool." In their resulting duel Allen specified that each man be stationed 80 paces apart, armed with four pistols and a bowie knife, and that they walk toward each other and fire at will. As one account puts it, "Gen. Allen dictated the use of these weapons evidently thinking that McClung would madly dash forward, speedily exhaust his fire, and then be left at his mercy. But he grievously miscalculated upon the impetuosity of his antagonist."[3]

The duel was held on the banks of the Pearl River, in a brushy 80-acre plot. At the signal, both men advanced deliberately. McClung reserved his fire. When they were a little more than 30 yards apart, Allen called out, "Now we'll see who's the coward."

"Yes, we will," responded McClung.

Allen fired his first pistol and missed his adversary.

"Are you content, sir, now that honor is satisfied?" McClung called out.

"No!" answered Allen, dropping his first pistol and drawing his second.

"Then I shall strike you in the teeth," growled McClung, and almost casually raised his pistol and fired. The ball hit Allen in the mouth, knocked out a number of teeth, took out a section of his tongue and imbedded itself in his spine. Allen slumped to the ground and died on the spot.

McClung had fired at a distance of nearly 100 feet. This is believed to be the best shot ever made with the smoothbore pistol in a duel. Such marksmanship is beyond the intrinsic accuracy of the weapon and must be attributed partly to luck.

There are several additional uncorroborated reports of duels involving McClung in this period. One was with a faro dealer in Vicksburg with whom he had argued; McClung wounded him in the shoulder. On another occasion, McClung stood in for a friend who was too broken in health to meet a challenger. McClung killed his opponent, whom he despised for having challenged an invalid.

McClung had long been close friends with John Menifee, a captain of the Vicksburg Rifles. One evening, when they were swimming in the Pearl River, Menifee began splashing mud on some boys nearby, preventing them from dressing. When this had continued beyond the bounds of good fun, McClung insisted he stop. Menifee refused, and the two men fought, McClung quickly trouncing his smaller adversary. McClung would have welcomed a reconciliation, but Menifee was not inclined to accept defeat graciously. A short time later, when McClung was in a billiard room, "partially stupefied with drink," Menifee attacked him from behind with a pool cue, beating him with such force that he fractured his skull, and then following as McClung was carried from the room, cursing and kicking him. Once McClung recovered he sent Menifee a challenge. Menifee accepted, choosing as his weapon the Jaeger, a large-caliber, short-barreled hunting rifle. As a captain in the Vicksburg Rifles, Menifee was known as a crack shot and was favored to win. On December 29, 1839, the day of the duel, the men of his regiment turned out in full uniform to cheer him on.

The following account was provided by an eyewitness, Mr. N.N. Jones:

> During the Winter of 1836 [*sic*] I was stopping in Vicksburg, Miss. Early one morning a report was circulated through the town that a duel was to be fought on the other side of the river, which was in the State of Louisiana and in which vicinity, at that time, no one lived. Following the example of others, I obtained a passage in a small boat and went over. The boatmen did a lively business that day. Some persons estimated the number of men and boys that were present and who witnessed the duel as high as 3,000. On landing I joined a group of persons, among whom was one dressed in a white suit, cut to military style. He was apparently about 22 years of

age, was about five feet in height, and weighed about 100 pounds. He was a handsome little gentleman, and was surrounded by friends. I soon learned that he was one of the two who were to exchange rifle shots at 30 steps, that his name was Menifee (a brother of Dick Menifee, a member of Congress from Kentucky much noted for eloquence), and a Vicksburg merchant of high standing. The white suit, I learned, was chosen because it was thought to be not as easy to draw a bead on white as on a dark color.[4] The bosom of his coat had the appearance of being padded. He appeared to be a little nervous, and took a little brandy now and then, possibly to quiet his nerves or fortify his courage.

In about half an hour two men were seen coming up the bank of the river. They proved to be Col. McClung, a lawyer, of Jackson, Miss., and his second. McClung had acquired some notoriety as a duelist, having, the report said, already killed his sixth man. He was a Kentuckian by birth and education, as also was his opponent, Menifee. He was about ten years older than the latter. . . .

The seconds, after throwing the heads and tails awhile for positions, and who should give the word, &c., stepped off the distance, 30 yards, placed both men facing the other, neither of them speaking to the other. McClung took from his pocket a large bowie knife and a horse pistol—there were no six-shooters made at that time—and gave them to his second; he then unbuttoned his vest and shirt, and showed to his opponent that there was nothing to prevent his bullet from an entrance to his heart. Menifee did not follow his example. The rifles were now handed to the principals by their seconds. One of the seconds took a position halfway between the duelists, and about twelve feet out of the direct line in which the deadly balls were expected to pass. He then said, "Gentlemen, are you ready?" Each one answered and said, "all ready." He then said, "One, two, fire, stop!" At the word "two," Menifee fired. I think McClung did not fire, as I heard but one report, and saw the latter club his gun, throw it some distance from him and say to his second, "D— you! You didn't cock it right!" The second probably had neglected to set the triggers.

No one being damaged, preparations went on for another round, and in about 30 minutes they took their positions again; the second said as before, "One, two, fire, stop!" At the word "two," Menifee, after the report, reeled part way round and fell, being wounded in the head. Hundreds immediately surrounded the prostrate man.

McClung, to all appearance, was perfectly cool. I went to where he was standing in about five minutes. His second came running from where Menifee lay and said to him, "You have killed him!" McClung then said, "Give me my pistol and bowie knife, and d— them, let them come on!" evidently expecting to be mobbed by Menifee's friends. I was told afterward by one who was there that a brother of Menifee did start to go to McClung, but was stopped by a friend, who told him his brother had become conscious and said he would fight again as soon as he was able. Poor fellow, he lived but two days. McClung and his friend left the ground immediately.

McClung, who had received a beating with a billiard cue from Menifee, was the challenging party; Menifee accepted the challenge. Having the right to choose the place of meeting and arms to fight, also the distance, Menifee chose to fight at his own home, with rifles, at 30 steps. It was said that he had prac-

> ticed with his rifle until he could hit a silver dollar at every shot. He did not shoot in the second encounter, and, very luckily, in his fall his gun was not discharged. Had it been, undoubtedly some of the spectators would have been wounded or killed, as there was a wall of men several tiers deep on each side and not more than feet from the direct line of the bullet's passage, and what few trees there were close around were also full of spectators. The Sheriff of the county was present, but did not make any attempt to prevent the duel from taking place. He was, however, prompt in doing his duty to prevent liquor being sold on the ground unlawfully. A man that had brought over the river a quantity for sale was prevented from selling it, unless he would pay to the Sheriff $50, that being the price for a license. This was the first and last duel I ever witnessed. I could scarcely realize that what I saw was a reality. I was disgusted at the sight, and resolved that I never would see another.[5]

Additional details are provided by other accounts: after McClung fired, he stood on tiptoe in an attempt to see over the cloud of gun smoke, so eager was he to be sure he had killed his man; he then dropped to his knees and kissed the barrel of his rifle, while thanking God for directing its bullet so well. His bullet actually hit the hammer of his opponent's gun and split, half of it being deflected and penetrating Menifee's brain. It is said that six members of Menifee's family subsequently challenged him, each going to his grave in turn, but that report is a bit too dramatic to be readily credited.

McClung's fame spread. He reportedly never dueled again, as no man dared fight him. One time, at a hotel's communal dining table, a stranger was taken aback when McClung used his bowie knife to cut himself a slab of butter. The stranger called the waiter over and said, "Remove the butter. That man stuck his knife in it."

McClung immediately shoved the plate of butter into the stranger's face and said to the waiter, "Remove the butter. This man stuck his nose in it."

The stranger furiously thrust his card at McClung by way of a challenge. McClung took it and gave him his own. Upon reading the name the stranger paled and begged, "Just let me have my card back. That's all I ask." McClung studied his trembling opponent for a moment before obliging.

On another occasion, McClung's powers of intimidation were put to the service of law and order. When the sheriff and posse were held at bay by an armed desperado, McClung simply walked up to the man and took the pistol from his hand.

A revealing portrait of McClung is provided by Reuben Davis, a physician and lawyer who served as a colonel in the Mexican War and was later elected to Congress. While in Jackson, Mississippi, in the winter of 1841, Davis took Governor Alcorn and Governor Clark for lunch at a restaurant known for its oysters.

Davis wrote:

> This house, although on the main street, was approached by a side entrance, a long outside stairway, with a sort of platform at the top, from which the door opened into a small entry. When we got to the place, the colored waiters were gathered upon the pavement, but that passed unnoticed, as we all knew their habits of idle curiosity as to what happened on the street. Neither did we attach any importance to the fact that one of them kept repeating, "Walk up, gentlemen, walk up," but all the while waited for us to go on, instead of preceding and ushering us into the room, as was his duty.
>
> Whether it was fright, or a desire to get up some excitement, I do not know, but none of the servants warned us that Colonel McClung was in the eating

room, and that he had driven everyone out of the house. He had been drinking heavily for some days, and had reached a state of actual insanity. The room was a very long one, and had two narrow tables extending the length of it. We were fairly within the room before we saw McClung seated at the head of one of the tables, and then it would have been instant death to attempt a retreat. He had a large dueling pistol on either side of a wine bottle that stood before him, and a bowie knife was disposed between them. His face was deeply flushed, and his bloodshot eyes gleamed angrily from beneath a mass of tawny hair. It was like walking into a lion's den, but we had no choice. Neither Alcorn nor Clark had any weapon, and I had only a small pocket pistol.

Now McClung did not like Clark, and he hated Alcorn with a singular intensity of hatred. We went up to the end of the unoccupied table, and after saluting McClung with elaborate courtesy, I took the seat at the head with my friends on either hand. Our eccentric neighbor spoke to me cordially, but treated the others with marked coldness. The waiter, whose black face was ashy with terror, served us hastily with wine and oysters, and disappeared without ceremony.

I whispered to Alcorn not to exasperate McClung by seeming to ignore his presence, but to ask him to take a glass of wine. He did so, and McClung, after glaring at him for a moment, replied with a fierce emphasis, "Not with *you*, sir; I drink my own wine," pouring out a tumbler full, as he spoke.

I don't suppose three men ever despatched food with more celerity than we did those unlucky oysters, or with less appreciation of its flavor. McClung had now begun to tell a story of how he had that day been attacked by three assassins in that very room, and got

> up to show just how he drove them off. Brandishing his bowie knife, he rushed down between the two tables, just grazing Clark's back as he passed him with a furious lunge. When he sat down again, he began to flourish his pistols, regardless of the fact that they were hair-trigger, liable to go off at a touch. As soon as it seemed prudent, our party rose to leave, not forgetting to go through the most careful parting salutations. Just as we reached the door, McClung jumped up with a pistol in each hand, and ordered us to stop.
>
> Coming closer, McClung addressed me first. He said, "Now, Davis, you don't believe one word I have said. You can't believe anything you don't see, but I don't care—you are made so, and can't help it. I like you, and won't try to make you say you believe anything. You can go, but these gentlemen are different, and they have got to say they believe every word I have told them, or I will shoot them on the spot." Wheeling round, he pointed both pistols at Alcorn, and said, "Do you believe I told the truth?" Alcorn immediately replied, as blandly as possible, "Why, colonel, do you suppose any gentleman ever questions what you assert?"
>
> McClung scowled at him, and turned upon Clark, who made the same reply. We were then permitted to depart, which we did with more haste than ceremony. We did not even stop to chastise the rascally waiter who had served us such a trick.[6]

McClung was widely admired by women for his powerful physique, brooding good looks, courtly manners, and Byronic curls, and his deadly aura made him all the more romantic. Having never married, he reportedly served as an alibi for countless Southern spinsters, who would wistfully explain, "You must realize I never married because I loved Alexander

McClung." Virginia Tunstall, of Columbus, Mississippi, was one of the belles whom he romanced for a few months. She wrote in her memoirs, "I loved him madly while with him, but feared him when away from him; for he was a man of fitful, uncertain moods and given to periods of deepest melancholy." He had a habit, during bouts of depression, of riding to a cemetery and throwing himself on a grave and then staring for hours "like a madman into the sky."[7]

McClung raised a regiment of volunteers for the Mexican War, acquired the rank of lieutenant colonel, and was in command of the 1st Regiment of Mississippi Rifles for several months until he was replaced by Jefferson Davis, who had West Point training and a colonel's rank. McClung never forgave Davis for superseding him, and the two men were at constant odds.

McClung came back from the war a hero. He had led the assault on the battlements at Monterrey in September 1846 and suffered two fingers shot off and a bullet through both thighs. "Suffered" is probably not the right word, though, for battle wounds were highly prized by gentlemen with political ambitions. He hoped his enhanced reputation would help him win election to Congress, but his opponent was a war hero too, and McClung was defeated, a bitter blow.

President Taylor named McClung chargé d'affaires in Bolivia, a position he held for two years before resigning. While he was there, reports circulated that he had dispatched "an overbearing Englishman." Further appointments were not forthcoming. McClung blamed Jefferson Davis for standing in his way, and he reportedly said that "before he died that he had but one desire to live to satisfy, and that was to fight a duel with Jeff Davis." He challenged Davis twice but received no response.

In January 1853, McClung received considerable praise for a eulogy he delivered in front of the Mississippi state legislature, honoring the recently deceased Henry Clay. When a friend described the speech as "pretty good," McClung was outraged.

"Why, you'd be unequal to a speech like that if you lived a thousand years and your capacity doubled every day of that time!" he declared.

As McClung entered his 40s his career spiraled downward. He had established no practice as a lawyer, seemed to have no future in politics, and owed money to friends and tradesmen. His effort to get an army commission failed. His killings—rumored to number 10 in 14 duels—weighed heavily on him, according to his nephew, John Henderson McClung. Invited to visit his uncle at his hotel room, John found him lying awake on a couch, fully clothed, a hand towel covering his eyes. When asked why he did not undress and go to bed, McClung responded that sleep was impossible for him. He described himself as "the unhappiest man in America" and appealed to his nephew never to fight a duel. Other friends recalled that when he was drunk, which was often, he justified his killings in endless, rambling fashion. He claimed to be haunted by the ghosts of those he had slain and kept lamps burning in his rooms all night long. He often expressed regret that he had not been killed in Mexico.

On March 23, 1855, McClung arose in his room at Jackson's Mansion House Hotel. He bathed, shaved, and dressed himself carefully in a fresh shirt and a white linen suit. He sat at his desk and wrote a poem titled "Ode to Death." He cut a deep "V" from the top of the back of his reading chair and arranged a trough running from it to a bucket on the floor. He pinned his poem to his chest and sat down, tilting his head back in the cutout. He cocked his pistol and fired a round neatly through his right temple. His blood ran down the trough into the bucket, leaving his face and clothing unsullied.

His poem read:

Swiftly o'er the waves of time,
Spirit of death.
In manhood's morn, in youthful prime,

I woo thy breath,
For the fading hues of hope have fled,
Like the dolphin's light,
And dark are the clouds above my head
As the starless night.
O, vainly the mariner sighs for the rest
Of the peaceful haven,
The pilgrim saint for the homes of the blest
And the calm of heaven.
The galley slave for the night wind's breath
At burning noon,
But more gladly I'll spring to thy arms, O death;
Come soon! Come soon!

In Mississippi's Hall of Fame, McClung was enshrined as "a man of high literary culture . . . the ablest and most polished writer among Mississippians." For many years his final poem was on display, along with his portrait and, of course, his pistol.[8]

NOTES

1. Benjamin Sands, *From Reefer to Rear Admiral* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1899): 9.
2. Anson De Puy Van Buren, *Jottings of a Year's Sojourn in the South* (Battle Creek, MI: 1859): 297.
3. Rev. William McClung, *The McClung Genealogy* (Pittsburgh: McClung Printing Company, 1904): 92.
4. This is the opposite of the conventional wisdom.
5. "A Duel Fifty Years Ago," *New York Times*, March 3, 1877, p. 7, col. 3.
6. Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (1889; reprint, Hattiesburg: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1972): 215–218.
7. Virginia Clay-Copton, *A Belle of the Fifties* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1905): 15.

8. A photograph of the large-bore percussion-type pistol owned by McClung was published in a Mississippi newspaper in 1948 and described as "a dainty, death-dealing derringer, silver-mounted, and measuring less than six inches in length." By 1960 it had disappeared from the state archives. See "Death-Dealing Dueling Iron Recalls 'Black Knight' Tale," *Jackson Daily News,* March 17, 1948, p. 4, col. 1.

54

BENITO MUSSOLINI

Shortly after he began taking fencing lessons, Mussolini's instructor told him, "I will now teach you the retreat."

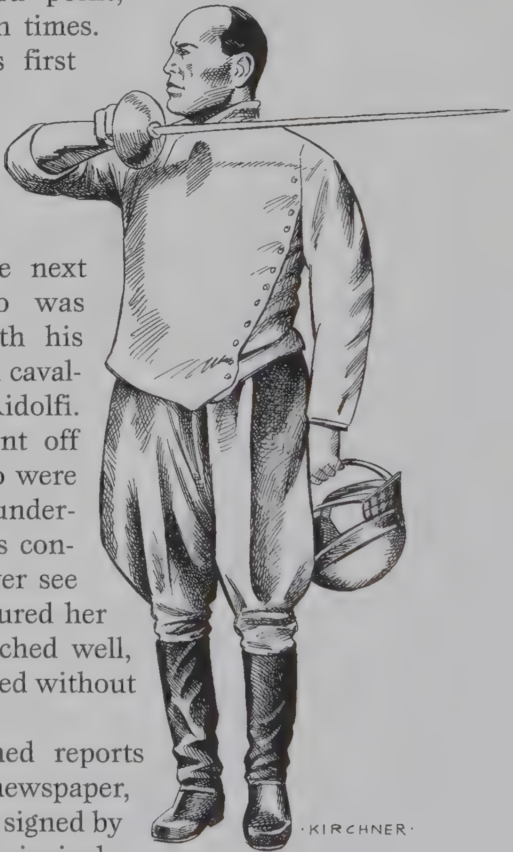
"Why?" demanded Mussolini.

"You must learn to defend yourself when your enemy presses too hard."

"That will never be my strategy," declared Mussolini.[1]

Retreating, conceding, compromising—none suited Mussolini; he would attack always. Even as a child he exhibited a strongly aggressive nature: at 7, he used a jagged stone to batter the face of an older boy who had stolen his wheelbarrow; at 10, he stabbed a schoolyard bully in the hand with a pocket knife; at 14, he stabbed another in the buttocks. In 1904, when he was 21 and living in Switzerland, he fought a pistol duel with a fellow Socialist; neither was wounded, but Mussolini was expelled from the canton as a result. Later, as a journalist and politician, he combined his penchant for physical violence with a rare gift for vituperation. Most of his targets are no longer familiar, but his characterization of Jesus Christ was typical: "Who was Christ, but a small mean man who in two years converted a few villages and whose disciples were a dozen ignorant vagabonds, the scum of Palestine?"[2]

In November 1914 Mussolini started a socialist newspaper in Milan, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, which deviated from the party line by favoring Italy's entry into World War I. He wrote most of it himself in his trademark unmodulated *fortissimo*, and it was an immediate success. His scathing personal attacks provoked a stream of confrontations, and for most of the following year he enthusiastically took on his political enemies at sword point, fighting about a dozen times. The night before his first duel, which was with Colonel Cristoforo, his wife, Rachele, recalled being kept awake by the clattering of swords in the next room, where Benito was practicing moves with his fencing master, retired cavalry officer Camillo Ridolfi. The next day he went off with his seconds, who were dressed in black "like undertaker's men." She was convinced she would never see him again, but he assured her that he had been coached well, and, indeed, he returned without a scratch.



Mussolini published reports of his duels in his newspaper, including the minutes signed by the seconds of both principals.

One such account was of his duel with an anarchist lawyer, Libero Merlino, who had impugned Mussolini's courage for failing to appear before an assembly of socialist neutralists. When Mussolini ran into Merlino at court, he called him a "rogue and a rascal" and, as *Il Popolo d'Italia* reported, "administered to [him] such a series of slaps and blows of the fist that he pushed him against a radiator and kept him . . . glued to it under an uninterrupted barrage. . . ."[3]

When Merlino recovered his composure he sent his seconds to Mussolini, requesting "reparation through arms." A duel was arranged for February 25, 1915, at 9 A.M.

When the duelists and their seconds met at the agreed location, they were promptly joined by the police; Merlino had been tailed. They were not arrested but were required to sign a report, and the sabers were confiscated. Out of earshot of the police, the parties agreed to rendezvous two hours later at another locale and left in four cars traveling in different directions. At the appointed time, the duel proceeded. It consisted of two assaults "conducted with extreme speed." In the first, each man suffered a violent blow with the flat of his opponent's saber, resulting in contusions to Merlino's right deltoid and Mussolini's right forearm. The second assault had nearly identical results, and when the halt was called the three doctors present declared that neither man was fit to continue. The opponents shook hands and parted.[4]

Mussolini's next duel was with Claudio Treves, a Socialist member of parliament and former director of *Avanti!*, whom Mussolini had accused of being a neutralist merely to safeguard his wife's money, describing him in print as "vile," "revolting," "venal," a "he-wife," "Claudio Tremens," and "Claudio the Rabbit." Tremens issued a challenge, and the duel was scheduled for March 29, 1915, at 3 P.M., at a villa outside Milan. The weapons would be sabers, *senza esclusione di colpi* (with no blows excluded), i.e., thrusts permitted as well as cuts. Allessandro Giuliani, *Il Popolo d'Italia*'s chief reporter, gave this account:

After the preparation, the adversaries were placed, facing each other, in an immense and austere hall, full of air and light. The director of the fight, Leonardo Pracchi, began with the usual directions to the duelists, who furiously attacked each other even before the director issued the order "*a voi*" [to you].

Pracchi put himself between the two, energetically shouting "Halt!" and returning the adversaries to their places. At his signal, they attacked again with a degree of violence which was truly exciting.

Three assaults followed one another with very short breaks between, after which the sabers needed to be replaced, since Mussolini had bent his so much it was no longer serviceable.

The director ordered the duelists to take one minute of rest. The fourth assault was even more furious than the preceding ones. Both Mussolini and Treves struck tremendously and continued the confrontation for a few moments after the "halt" commanded by Pracchi.

Treves suffered an injury on his right forearm; Mussolini had an abrasion in the same place. The director admonished the duelists to obey his instructions and stop immediately when told.

On the fifth assault the socialist member of parliament suffered a wound under his right armpit; Mussolini some hits with the flat of the blade. The doctors mutually agreed that the duel might continue.

We then arrived at the sixth assault, which was also very violent. Mussolini attacked his adversary with exceptional vehemence, and Treves parried and counterattacked with equal tenacity. At the "halt" the M.P. for Bologna was wounded on his forehead. The doctors treated him and agreed that he might contin-

> ue. And so we arrived at the seventh assault, which ended with some flat hits, and then to the eighth and last—still very lively—which ended with a wound suffered by Mussolini on his right ear.
>
> At this point, the doctors decided to terminate the duel, which had lasted 25 minutes. The adversaries, each followed by his seconds, went to adjacent halls for medical treatment without having reconciled. . . .
>
> Doctor Ambrogio Binda, who has witnessed about 40 duels, told us he has never seen one so violent as that of yesterday. Dr. Allevi and Director Pracchi, both military men, expressed the same view, with a certain admiration toward the duelists, which, in truth, we found pleasing.[5]

This duel, from which Mussolini returned home in a blood-soaked shirt, missing a piece of his ear, upset his wife. Rachele wrote that she was not so much worried about him—"So often had Benito returned unscathed that I no longer worried for his life"—as the expense. They were living on a shoestring, yet her husband spent money on the services of a fencing master and surgeon, hired lookouts to keep an eye out for the police, bought gifts for his seconds, and had to pay lawyers' fees when his duels resulted in court proceedings. Particularly galling to her was the fact that a brand-new shirt could be ruined in a couple of hours. She told him that he must either stop dueling or wear the same shirt to each one from then on. He chose the latter.

His dueling became so much a part of their lives that they developed a code by which they could discuss it in front of her mother without frightening her. If Mussolini was going off to duel he would tell Rachele, "Today we're making spaghetti." If everything turned out well, he'd phone her and say, "You can throw out the spaghetti."

In later years, Rachele remembered these as happy times: Benito always described the duels in the most amusing fashion, and afterward, to celebrate, he usually took her out to a puppet show, one of his favorite amusements.[6]

In May 1915 Italy declared war, in part due to Mussolini's relentless editorializing. He enlisted in August and served with distinction, refusing to abandon the front lines for a proffered post of army historian. His "war diary" was telegraphed to his newspaper and published daily. In February 1917 he was badly injured when a grenade launcher exploded, and he did not return to the lines.

Mussolini blamed the Socialists for Italy's poor performance in the war, and in 1919 he formed the fascist movement, dedicated to restoring Italy's greatness. He promulgated his new philosophy from an editorial desk on which he kept a live grenade and a loaded pistol. Behind his chair hung a black flag emblazoned with a skull, a dagger clenched in its teeth. In these props, as in so much of what he did, one sees the exaggerated, theatrical side of Mussolini that struck so many of his contemporaries as faintly ridiculous. There is no question that he had courage, but his manner of displaying it was clearly calculated for effect. He bragged to the press of his love of dueling, of driving along mountain roads at reckless speed, of jumping horses, and of flying small planes (in which he once had a near-fatal crash). Mussolini was molding his image as an intellectual who was nonetheless a man of action, a visionary who had the courage of his convictions.

His next duel of which we have an account was on October 28, 1921, with Socialist deputy Francesco Ciccotti-Scozzese. Ciccotti had been in the middle of arranging a duel with Lt. Ulisse Iliori when Iliori's seconds dismissed him as "unsuitable," because a few weeks earlier he had failed to react to an article published in *Il Popolo d'Italia* in which Mussolini had described him as "the most despicable of the men who infect Italian public life." Ciccotti had not seen the article, but, seeking to repair his reputation, he quickly issued a challenge, which Mussolini accepted.

The prospective duel attracted international news attention, delighting Mussolini but complicating the arrangements because the police put him under constant surveillance.

The duel was finally arranged to take place at Villa Perti, near Livorno, a half-day's drive southeast of Milan. Mussolini and his seconds left Milan in a powerful racing car. Speeding along winding roads, he managed to outdistance one of his pursuers, Commissioner Pistone, at Piacenza. Then, when he had a flat tire in Parma and pulled into a courtyard to change it, the others roared past the narrow entry and lost his trail.

The duelists met on a tree-lined path in the garden of the villa, well hidden by walls. They would fight with dueling épées, with gloves and gauntlets protecting the arm to the elbow. The duration of the assaults was to be at the discretion of the director, with combat to cease when one of the combatants became incapacitated.

As the blades were being disinfected, the police arrived and ordered the duel to stop. The seconds agreed but claimed that they had to retire inside the villa to draw up their report, and that that would require some time. While the police were strolling the grounds, the duelists and their seconds locked themselves inside the villa, cleared a large room of furniture, sprinkled the floor with sand and rosin, and proceeded with the encounter. Ugo Gheraldi, the fight director, provided a description of it:

> Immediately from the first assault, Mussolini attacked in a spirited and decisive fashion, so much so that a halt had to be called almost immediately, because Ciccotti quickly backed up to the boundary of the area allotted to him. The ensuing assaults followed the pattern of the first, with Mussolini attacking with determination and clean, deep steps forward, while Ciccotti assumed a rigid guarding position and backed up step by step.

> On the fourth and fifth assault the tip of Mussolini's sword reached the body of his adversary. The first time over the elbow; the second on the side, four fingers under the armpit. The duel was immediately suspended and it was confirmed that Mussolini's sword had clearly perforated Ciccotti's shirt twice. The successive assaults were extremely brief, out of necessity. Ciccotti appeared very tired, and the doctors intervened two or three times with the seconds, claiming that it was impossible for Ciccotti to continue given that his heart problems were worsening to an alarming extent, due to exertion. The seconds did not accept this opinion, but agreed that the assaults be kept very brief. We reached the fourteenth assault after two time breaks requested by the seconds and agreed upon by myself. At this point the doctors intervened again, expressing their opinion that the match should be halted, given the clear impossibility for Ciccotti to continue. They threatened to leave, reminding the witnesses of their legal responsibilities if they did not act in accordance with their recommendations. I then suspended the match and the witnesses met for the writing up of the minutes.[7]

Mussolini later pooh-poohed Ciccotti's heart problem, saying that "fear had set him all aflutter." Ciccotti was put to bed at the villa while the doctors treated him. Mussolini remained in his fencing garb until his seconds told him there would be no further fighting that day.

Dr. Binda reported that he had listened to the heart and taken the pulse of Mussolini, and that "they appeared to be those of a man who had just woken up after a very tranquil night."

Mussolini fought with fellow Fascist Cristoforo Baseggio on March 28, 1922. The minutes read:

> The fight began at 11.00 and terminated at 11.20. Seven assaults took place, performed with chivalrous vigor. On the second assault Baseggio suffered a three centimeter linear wound on his face; on the fourth Mussolini was wounded with a cut on his right forearm; on the fifth Mussolini suffered another cut and a slight graze on his right forearm; on the seventh Baseggio suffered a wound on his right middle finger, to the bone, four centimeters wide, which, based on the doctors' opinion, put him in a clear state of inferiority, not being able to hold his saber any longer.
>
> So ended the fight. The adversaries reconciled themselves spontaneously.[8]

Mussolini's last duel was on May 13, 1922, with Mario Missiroli, director of the paper *Il Secolo*. According to the published minutes:

> The fight lasted forty minutes, in which time seven assaults took place. During the first assault the tip of Mussolini's sword snapped off on one hit. In the third assault Dr. Missiroli suffered a light wound to his right forearm. It was decided that the fight should continue, as the wound was inconsequential. In the seventh assault Dr. Missiroli suffered a wound to his right forearm, penetrating into the muscle strata, and cutting a group of veins for approximately 5 centimeters on the ulnar side, which put him in a clear state of inferiority in the unanimous judgment of the doctors. Consequently, the seconds declared the fight terminated. The duelists behaved as perfect gentlemen, but parted without reconciliation.[9]

By the end of the year, Mussolini was ruling Italy as the leader of the Fascist Party. For years he continued to practice fencing daily and maintained his instructor, Ridolfi, as part of his household staff. Mussolini fought no more duels, though in the 1930s he reportedly challenged a historian, Guglielmo Ferrero, whose writing displeased him (Ferrero declined).

George Seldes, a journalist who interviewed Il Duce in the mid-1920s, asked him the classic question: *which is mightier, the pen or the sword?* Seldes recalled having asked it of Leon Trotsky, also a journalist and swordsman; Trotsky unhesitatingly replied *the pen*. Mussolini was just as quick to insist *the sword*.

"But why?" asked Seldes.

"Because it cuts."

"Cuts?"

"Yes. Cuts. Ends things. *Finish*," he said, the last word in English, pronounced as *feeneesh*. "I believe in action, I believe in the sword. That alone, not the pen, can end intolerable things. The sword is decisive. It cuts."[10]

In 1940 Mussolini made his disastrous alliance with Nazi Germany. He was deposed in 1943 and on April 28, 1945, executed by a partisan firing squad. His last words: "Shoot for the chest!"

NOTES

1. George Seldes, *You Can't Print That: The Truth Behind the News, 1918–1928* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Co., 1929): 107.
2. Christopher Hibbert, *Il Duce: The Life of Benito Mussolini* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975): 9.
3. Laura Fermi, *Mussolini* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961): 115.
4. "La vertenza Mussolini-Merlino risolta con un duello," *Il Popolo d'Italia* February 26, 1915, p. 4, col. 1.
5. "Il duello Mussolini-Treves," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, March 30, 1915, p. 3, col. 1.

6. Rachele Mussolini, *Mussolini: An Intimate Biography by His Widow* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1974): 34–36.
7. "Il duello Mussolini-Ciccotti si é svolto à Livorno," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, October 28, 1921, p. 1, col. 4.
8. "Il duello Mussolini-Baseggio," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, March 28, 1922, p. 5, col. 1.
9. "Il duello Mussolini-Missiroli," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, May 14, 1922, p. 6, col. 3.
10. Seldes, *You Can't Print That,* 115–116.

55

GEORGE ROBERT “FIGHTING” FITZGERALD, THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY DUELIST OF ALL

It was said that George Robert Fitzgerald was born with a silver spoon in his mouth but it soon melted. So hot was George Robert’s temper that his nickname—“Fighting Fitzgerald”—became a catchphrase for the pugnacious Irishman.

He was born in 1748 in County Mayo, Ireland, heir to the Turlough estates. According to one profile, Fitzgerald’s father was “one of the worst specimens of his class,” which characteristically lived “in a state of riot, ignorance and brutality quite unparalleled in any modern civilization. Hunting by day and orgies at night were their habitual occupation, diversified by duels.”[1]

As a boy, George Robert learned to ride to the hounds, and he developed into a balls-out, breakneck equestrian. For years after his death, local fox hunters would point out obstacles he had jumped and places he had crossed the Turlough River in a flood. On a bet, he once jumped his mount over a wall with a 14-foot drop on the far side. The horse was so badly injured it had to be destroyed.

Fitzgerald attended Eton and afterward received a commission in the army. At age 16, while stationed at Galway, he snatched a kiss from a young shopgirl, and her shriek brought a neighboring merchant to the scene. Fitzgerald dismissed his challenge, saying, "I'll not draw swords with a boorish shopkeeper; bring me a gentleman and I'll promise you I'll meet him."

The merchant quickly buttonholed a suitable candidate, Michael French. He and Fitzgerald locked themselves in the back room of a draper's shop and faced off at six paces. On French's signal both fired; Fitzgerald's bullet grazed French's temple, but French's pistol failed to fire. Just as Fitzgerald was offering him the use of his powder horn to prime for a second exchange, the door was broken down and the combatants separated.

Some time later Fitzgerald gave offense to a fellow officer, Lieutenant Thompson, and they met at 5 A.M. in a garden near Galway Bay. At the second exchange Fitzgerald hit Thompson in the hand, while Thompson's ball struck Fitzgerald in the middle of the forehead. Fitzgerald's wound was potentially deadly, but the bullet was successfully removed, his skull trepanned, and the hole patched with silver plate. It was six months before he fully recovered, and his increasingly erratic behavior was sometimes attributed to this injury.

In 1770 he married the rich and beautiful Jane Connolly, and the couple moved to Paris, where family connections gave him entrée to Versailles. He initially made a splash with his extravagance and high spirits, but he lost favor by his presumptuousness during a royal hunt. When the stag jumped into the Seine and swam across, Fitzgerald plunged after it on his horse, bringing the animal to bay on the far bank and slitting its throat. This was a privilege normally reserved for the king.

Living beyond his means soon caught up with the impetuous Irishman, and one of his creditors, a Major Baggs, put out the word that he was not honoring his debts. Fitzgerald issued a prompt challenge and got his friend Archibald Hamilton Rowan to serve as his second. To Rowan, Fitzgerald admitted that “many persons might suppose that he really owed the money to Major Baggs, but that he would rather fight than pay.”[2]

Fitzgerald wanted to bring swords as well as pistols to the field to ensure that the duel might be fought to a conclusion. Baggs did him one better, declaring that rather than swords, the men should come equipped with bags of bullets, flasks of powder, and armchairs. They finally agreed to make do with a brace of pistols each.

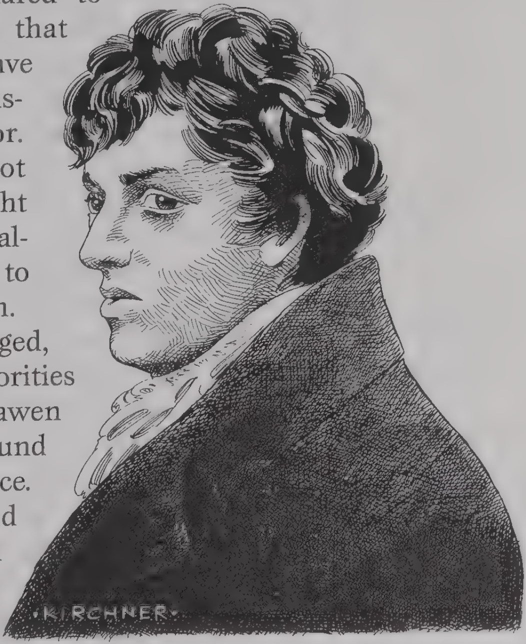
The two met near Valenciennes in the Austrian Netherlands. Baggs suspected that Fitzgerald was *plastroné*, or wearing concealed armor. Fitzgerald stripped down to his shirt to show he was not, after which Baggs did likewise. They took their places at a distance of eight paces, a pistol in each hand. According to Rowan, before he fired,

> Major Baggs sunk on his quarters, something like the Scottish lion; Fitzgerald stood as one who had made a lunge in fencing. They fired together, and were in the act of levelling their second pistols, when Baggs sunk on his side, saying, “Sir, I am wounded.”
>
> “But you are not dead,” replied Fitzgerald; and at that same moment discharged his second pistol at his fallen enemy. Baggs immediately started on his legs, and advanced on Fitzgerald, who, throwing his pistol at him, quitted his station, and kept a zigzag course across the field, Baggs following him. I saw the flash of the Major’s second pistol, and at the same moment Fitzgerald lay stretched on the ground. I was just [in] time enough to catch Baggs as he was falling after having fired his second shot. He swooned from intense pain, the small bone of his leg being broken. Mr. Fitzgerald came up to us, saying, “We are both wounded; let us go back to the ground.”

> But Baggs was taken to his carriage. As I was assisting Fitzgerald, whose wound was in the fleshy part of his thigh, I could not avoid asking him how he came to discharge his second pistol. His answer was: "I should not have done so at any man but Baggs."[3]

After his recovery, Fitzgerald resettled in London, where he fell in with the Macaronis, the gang of young dandies who figured in a number of duels and brawls during the Georgian era.

In 1773 he got into a difficulty with the Rev. Henry Bate, editor of the *Morning Post*. In an attempt to embarrass him, Fitzgerald tricked Bate into fighting a man purporting to be Fitzgerald's footman but who was in fact a professional prizefighter. Bate, however, not only gave the man a sound thrashing, but extracted a confession from him implicating Fitzgerald. The scandal kept society abuzz for the season. Capt. John Scawen, a Guards officer, declared to his fellow officers that Fitzgerald ought to have been beaten for his disgraceful behavior. When Fitzgerald got word of this he sought Scawen out and challenged him, hoping to redeem his reputation.



A duel was arranged, but when the authorities found out about it Scawen was arrested and bound over to keep the peace. However, Fitzgerald perversely insisted that Scawen had been afraid to face him, and when Scawen attempted to arrange a new meeting across the Channel, Fitzgerald refused on the grounds that he had been revealed as a coward. The next time they ran into each other, Scawen beat Fitzgerald with his stick to force a duel upon him.

In August 1773, in Lisle in the Périgord in France, they faced off, each holding two pistols. Fitzgerald quickly took his two shots and, having missed, dropped to his knees before Scawen could fire once. Somehow, the seconds arranged a reconciliation. Scawen apologized for his remarks and, in a symbolic gesture, allowed Fitzgerald to place a sword lightly on his shoulder.

Two years later Fitzgerald fought with a Light Dragoons officer, Thomas Walker. Walker had run into debt betting on horses, and Fitzgerald bought, at a severe discount, one of his notes for £3,000. Fitzgerald initially agreed to discharge the note for £500, but soon after Walker paid him Fitzgerald demanded the rest of the money. When Walker claimed he did not have it, Fitzgerald beat him with a cane, leading to a duel. Walker published an account of it that cast his opponent in an unfavorable light, and Fitzgerald responded with his own pamphlet, *The Reply to Thomas Walker, Esq.: Ci-Devant Cornet in Burgoyne's Light Dragoons* (1775), in which he belittled Walker's accusations point by point.

They had met at 8 o'clock on the evening of August 20, 1775, at Cavendish Square. The distance was set at 10 paces, but, as Fitzgerald subsequently accused Walker, "your Second, who was the *only person* that measured the ground, kindly took care, from a thorough knowledge of your constitution I suppose, to take gigantic strides, and thus eked out those *ten* paces to *twelve*." Fitzgerald claimed he would have preferred six paces, for "I can at that distance hit any part of the human body to *a line*, which, possibly you may know, is only the *twelfth part of an inch.*" Fitzgerald added that he had developed his marksmanship for strictly humanitarian reasons, since it enabled him to wound a man without taking his life.

The adversaries loaded their pistols in the presence of the seconds and then leveled them at each other as the seconds stepped aside. Walker, as the offended party, got the first fire. As he pulled his trigger, Fitzgerald ducked, which caused Walker to miss.

In his pamphlet, Fitzgerald scoffed at Walker's imputations of cowardice:

> Ignorant as you are in this branch of polite education, it does not seem at all extraordinary to me that you should be surprized to see me throw myself into the most advantageous position I possibly could, to receive your fire. Of what benefit is theoretical knowledge if it is not to be carried into practice at the only time it can be of effectual service to us? Accustomed to study arms not superficially but *scientifically*, the moment you levelled your pistol at me, at that very instant I made as outstretched an *élongé* as it was possible for me to make, and by thus throwing myself into a *side-way* position, I not only presented as little surface of body as could be, but also lost full sixteen inches of my natural height. Besides, by throwing myself into this attitude, and by keeping my eye in a direct level with the muzzle of your pistol, I was enabled to cover both my head and heart from your fire, for the bullet must first have penetrated the palm of my hand, *before* it could have reached the lobes of my brain; and it must have perforated the whole horizontal length of my right arm, which is almost impossible, before it could have made its passage to my heart. This, Sir, is properly understanding the *science* of arms as a SCIENCE; and even when you shall have advanced thus far there are a thousand other fair advantages an ADEPT hath over a novice, which no mercenary artist either will or can teach

> you, and which are only to be acquired by intense study and private practice, which, like a masked battery, should never be made known to our adversary but by its sudden, unexpected effect.[4]

Rather than immediately return Walker's fire, Fitzgerald apologized for having struck him and said he hoped he had given him satisfaction. Walker was disposed to drop the dispute, but Fitzgerald immediately again demanded that he pay the £2,500 or submit the matter to third-party arbitration. Walker denied any such obligation.

Walker wrote, "On this he demanded satisfaction, and in a very self-sufficient manner presenting his pistol, declared to our seconds, he would bet £1,000 he hit me. Whether this was done *in terrorem* [to frighten] or no, I will not say—but after a long parley, he very deliberately took his aim at me; the pistol missed fire; which, with some *gentlemen*, would have been considered as a shot."[5]

Fitzgerald admitted to proposing a bet on his shot, but added, "I proposed the bet to your Second, but not, Sir, *to you*; because if I had won, I had learnt from experience, that you neither would pay me, nor leave the merits of my demand to a friendly arbitrament. Nor was the bet proposed *in terrorem*, for that would have been a work of mere supererogation."[6] As for considering a misfire a fire, he dismissed that as a mere "Irishcism." He had adjusted his flint, reprimed his pistol, and fired again, this time with effect.

Walker wrote, "I received the ball on the bone of my right arm, about two inches below the shoulder; from the quantity of powder which produced it, it did not penetrate my surtout. Mr. Fitzgerald perceiving I had been shot, quitted his ground, and run up to me, (very improperly, unless he concluded the duel was ended) saying, he hoped he had not hurt me. An extraordinary epithet, indeed, for a man who but a minute before offered a bet of £1,000 he hit me."[7]

As Fitzgerald remembers it, though, he told Walker that he hoped he had not *killed* him only because of concern for his own legal situation.

Walker was unable to raise his arm, and his surgeon advised him to return home so he could examine his wound and treat it. In addition, a crowd had begun to gather, so there was no possibility of continuing the duel. As Walker was being helped into his surgeon's carriage, Fitzgerald suddenly accused him of being "papered"—protected by layers of paper or cloth under his outer garment. Walker angrily denied the charge, but Fitzgerald repeated it in elaborate detail in his pamphlet:

> So, then, you had one SURTOUT on: are you certain you had not half a dozen? If no more than one surtout, pray how many coats and waistcoats? You give no account of your undergarments. I ask these questions, Sir, because after reading your pamphlet, I took the same pistol, charged it with the same quantity of powder, used a bullet cast in the same mould, measured out twelve good paces with a yard-wand, and then fired at a thick stick, which I had previously covered over with two waistcoats lined, one coat lined, and one double-milled drab surtout. What think you, Sir, was the result? Why, Sir, the ball penetrated through the surtout, the coat, two waistcoats, and lodged itself an inch deep in the stick. There is nothing like experimental philosophy for a fair proof, it beats your *ipse-dixits* all-halloo.[8]

During this period, Fitzgerald attempted to get a better foothold in London society by asking Adm. Keith Stewart to propose him for membership in Brooks's, an exclusive men's club. This put the admiral in an awkward position: he knew he must either comply with the irascible Irishman or fight him. He chose the former. Fitzgerald waited in the anteroom while the membership committee met in an upstairs boardroom. A box was passed around into which committee members placed a white ball to accept, a black ball to reject. When everyone had done so, there was not a white ball in the box. This presented a quandary: if Fitzgerald was told that there was not a single vote for him, he would know that Stewart too had blackballed him. After some discussion it was decided to send a servant down to tell the supplicant that, unfortunately, there had been one vote against him. This news did not have the desired effect. Shoving the servant aside, Fitzgerald bounded up the stairs and into the boardroom, where he told the membership committee that there had been a mistake, and he could prove it. Turning to Stewart, he asked, "Did you blackball me, sir? A gentleman both by father and mother, and a gentleman, I say, *who has never missed his man?*"

"My good sir," responded Stewart, "how could you suppose such a thing?"

Asking each gentleman in turn, and finding no one who would admit to having cast the negative vote, Fitzgerald proved his point. Taking a seat at the table, he ordered champagne.

The members did their best to ignore him that evening, but the following day they ordered half a dozen constables to be at the door should Fitzgerald show up. Evidently having gotten word of this, he never returned. However, he often boasted of having been unanimously elected a member of Brooks's.[9]

Fitzgerald's father was a candidate for Parliament in 1776, and George Robert returned home for the campaign. He soon joined the lists of the fire-eaters, fighting and killing a Mr. Cornet Swords in Ballinrobe and facing the notorious duelist Alexander English in April 1779 at St. Stephen's Green with swords. English was the stronger man and wounded Fitzgerald in several places, including the buttocks. (This wound caused Fitzgerald to limp for the rest of his life, a vexing humiliation.)

While residing at his townhouse in Dublin, Fitzgerald made it a practice to take up a position in the middle of a narrow street crossing so that anyone who wished to pass him had either to step into the mud or jostle him, and any gentleman who did the latter was immediately challenged. Mary MacCarthy wrote, "[Fitzgerald] began to be talked of as a most dangerous man; odd; with his charming countenance and slight and boyish figure, his polished and polite urbanity, his complete air of a man of the world. His misleadingly gentle manner would suddenly become unexpectedly insolent and impertinent, black with fury and without control at the slightest disagreement, an indignant expression coming into his eyes. He was at all times an ingenious liar; audacious at saving his own face and putting others in the wrong, which made him an exasperating and intolerable opponent."[10]

Fitzgerald's wife took ill and died at about this time, and he was devastated by her death. With a long funeral procession of followers and servants, he traveled to Kildare to bury her in her family plot. When he stopped at an inn he would have her coffin brought to his room to grieve over it. When one innkeeper objected, Fitzgerald drove him out of his own premises with a drawn sword.

Upon his return to the family estate, his behavior became increasingly erratic. He took to hunting by torchlight, and the sound of his gang of horsemen and hounds rampaging across the countryside at night filled local farmers with dread.

At this time, the threat of a possible French invasion gave isolated landlords the opportunity to raise their own militias. Fitzgerald transformed the Mayo Volunteers into a private army, fortifying his country home with six cannon salvaged from a shipwreck.

He was feared and hated by the local peasantry, and his relations with his neighbors verged on open warfare. After an angry meeting with Caesar Ffrench over a property dispute, the two fought a sword duel before a large crowd in the main street of Castlebar.

> Both were excellent swordsmen, and they fought for a length of time up and down the street, making passes and feints, to the delight and admiration of the bystanders. At length Ffrench got a smart wound in the hip, which roused him to double exertion; and being the heavier and stronger man, he pressed George Robert so hard, that *he* felt that his only way to save his life was to throw himself on the ground as if he had fallen by chance. Of course, Ffrench was too honourable a man to take advantage of his fallen foe; and his wound now being very troublesome, he was conveyed to his inn; whereupon Fitzgerald, with his usual arrogance, asserted that he had conquered his antagonist, inasmuch as he had wounded him and had also possession of the field. It was said on this occasion that Fitzgerald had on a sword-proof buff [leather] waistcoat, and there were those present who asserted that they saw Ffrench's sword bend on his body.[11]

Fitzgerald was increasingly at odds with his father as well, whom he felt had squandered the family fortune. He got legal custody of the old man and made him a virtual prisoner, starving him, beating him, and once keeping him manacled to his pet bear for a day.

When the high sheriff, Denis Browne, expressed concern about Fitzgerald's behavior, Fitzgerald rode to Browne's estate, Westport House, and shot his favorite wolfhound. Confronting Fitzgerald from his doorway, Browne challenged him to a duel, to be fought as soon as possible. Because Fitzgerald was known for his expertise with the pistol and the small sword, Browne requested that they fight with broadswords, and Fitzgerald agreed. However, as Browne stepped out of his house to get a neighbor to be his second, Fitzgerald suddenly drew a pistol and shot at him. He missed, but with all prospect of a fair fight obliterated, Browne ran back inside his house and declared he would have nothing to do with such an assassin.

One of Browne's friends, Richard Martin, was so outraged by the slaughter of the wolfhound[12] that he wished to challenge Fitzgerald himself but held back, not wanting to imply that Browne could not safeguard his own honor. Instead he decided to provoke a quarrel with Fitzgerald at the earliest opportunity, which came in 1781, when Fitzgerald's younger brother, Charles Lionel, took him to court for mistreatment of their father. Martin volunteered to prosecute the case. In Fitzgerald's defense, his attorney described his father as "one of the worst men alive," inspiring Martin to declare, "though . . . in the course of a long life this wretched father [has] committed many crimes, yet the greatest crime against society and the greatest sin against Heaven that he ever perpetrated was having *begotten the traverser*!"

To this, Fitzgerald responded, "Martin, you look very healthy, you take good care of your *constitution*; but I tell you that you have this day taken very bad care of your *life*."

Fitzgerald was fined £500 and sentenced to two years in prison but was released after a few months, thanks to the intercession of Lord Buckinghamshire, the lord lieutenant, brother-in-law of Fitzgerald's late wife.

Fitzgerald nursed his grudge against Martin, and when the two met at a Dublin theater they got into an angry exchange. "You no doubt expect to hear from me, and it shall be early in the morning," said Martin.

"*I* shall hear from *you* tomorrow?" demanded Fitzgerald, who expected to be regarded as the challenger. He threw a punch at Martin, who accused him of cowardice, suggesting that by making a public scene he hoped to be bound over by the authorities, thereby escaping a duel. When Martin sent his second to Fitzgerald's Dublin home, Fitzgerald, still refusing to consider himself the challenged party, beat the man with a stick. As a result, the three men were indicted for breach of the peace. The fight could not be consummated for a year, but it was finally arranged for July 14, 1784, at Castlebar.

Recalling the duel, Martin wrote, "I had sent my duelling pistols by a fellow who got drunk on the road, and forgot his errand. Procuring a case of the common holster pistols my servant rode with, I determined to use them, but they were so stiff in the trigger that I could hardly let them off. I fastened on my sword and . . . walked into the town and saw Fitzgerald, followed by his mob. He too wore his sword, and I instantly told him to draw. He answered that he was lame, the pavement bad, and that he could not keep his footing. . . .[13]

Martin then said, "I am going to the barrack-yard, where you'll have even ground, and I expect you there, sir."

Fitzgerald responded, "I'll consult my own leisure, and be in no hurry; after striking you in the theater the other night for your pertness, and you letting it pass, you haven't the pluck of a worm."

Martin made a quick stroke at Fitzgerald's face with a switch, but Fitzgerald parried it.

Accompanied by their seconds, the two men walked to the barracks yard and posted sentries to keep out the crowd that was gathering. Martin took his place 12 paces from Fitzgerald, who said, "Ah, sir, come closer, this is child's play; a cannonball wouldn't reach you at that distance. Are you afraid you'll be hurt?"

"I'll come as close as you please, for I'll march up till I lay my pistol on your face," responded Martin. According to his account:

> I accordingly advanced until our pistols touched. We both fired; he missed me, but I hit him full in the breast, and he fell back, supporting himself by a projection of rock, and [as Martin aimed his second pistol] exclaiming, "Honour, Martin, honour!"
>
> I said, "If you are not disabled, I will wait as long as you choose!"
>
> At this moment he crouched treacherously like a

> cat, presented, fired, and hit me. I returned the fire and hit him; he again recovered, came up, begged my pardon, [and] asked to shake hands.

Despite having apologized, Fitzgerald visited Martin while he was having his wound dressed to request a second meeting. Martin wrote:

> He named the day, to which I assented. It was *reported*, but I cannot vouch for the fact, that a party was sent to intercept and murder me. Shortly after I reached Sligo, my opponent sent Sir M. Crofton to say that "Mr. Fitzgerald did not require any further renewal of the quarrel," and thus the affair ended. My surprise at Fitzgerald being alive and well, after having received two shots from *horse pistols* full upon him, was soon cleared up. He had *plated his body*, so as to make it completely bullet-proof. On receiving my fire, he fell from the force of the balls striking him direct, and touching his concealed armour. My wound was in the body.
>
> The elegant and gentlemanly appearance of this man, as contrasted with the savage treachery of his actions was extremely curious, and without parallel of which I am aware.[14]

This was Fitzgerald's last duel. Altogether he is known to have fought 12, though informal estimates put the figure at 26. Either way, Fitzgerald's sanguinary career far surpasses that of any other Irish duelist on record and possibly of any duelist ever.

For Fitzgerald dueling was a quasi-legal means by which he could indulge his temper and exact vengeance, and his shameless behavior indicates that honor meant little to him. But even with all his precautions, he is supposed to have been wounded 46 times. Near the end of his life, a witness who saw him undressed noted that "every part of Fitzgerald's body was covered with wounds, which he had received in the various rencontres and duels he had been engaged in. There was a large hole where a ball had lodged in one of his hips, another in the small of one of his legs; his head had been trepanned, and his right side was so perforated with pricks of a small sword that it had an appearance not easy to describe."[15]

In June 1786, Fitzgerald was accused of involvement in the assassination of Patrick McDonnell, a neighbor who had replaced him as head of the Volunteers. A mob of McDonnell's friends and supporters headed for the mansion at Turlough, armed with guns, sticks, and scythes. Fitzgerald was warned of their approach, but, seized with panic, he was unable even to mount his horse, and the mob found him hiding under a pile of clothes in his bedroom. He was dragged off to jail, where that night he was attacked in his cell, stabbed with a bayonet and shot several times. He reportedly fought back like a wildcat.

At his trial, Fitzgerald told the court, "I never feared death, nor am I afraid to meet it in any shape, in the most formidable, even an ignominious death."[16]

The jury brought in a verdict of guilty, the sentence death, to be carried out the same day. Fortified by liquor, Fitzgerald sprang up the ladder and put the rope around his own neck. He leapt "with the utmost violence" from the ladder, but the rope broke and he fell to the ground. "Is it possible the grand jury of Mayo will not afford me a rope sufficiently strong?" he called out gamely, but in the time it took to procure a new rope, he sobered up and lost his nerve. He stood at the top of the ladder praying, weeping, and begging for mercy for nearly an hour before jumping off. His body was allowed to hang for 40 minutes before it was cut down.

NOTES

1. "Fighting Fitzgerald," *Catholic World* 29 (August 1879): 702.

2. Archibald Rowan, *Autobiography of Archibald Rowan* (1840; reprint, Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972): 63.
3. Ibid., 65–66.
4. George Robert Fitzgerald, *The Reply to Thomas Walker, Esq.: Ci-Devant Cornet in Burgoyne's Light Dragoons* (London: Parker, J. Ridley and T. Evans, 1775): 29, 31.
5. Ibid., 17.
6. Ibid., 35.
7. Ibid., 17–18.
8. Ibid., 37, 39.
9. John Timbs, *Club Life of London* (London: Richard Bentley, 1866) 1:102–107.
10. Mary MacCarthy, *Fighting Fitzgerald and Other Papers* (London: Martin Secker, 1930): 91.
11. *The Life and Times of George Robert Fitzgerald, Commonly Called Fighting Fitzgerald* (London: William S. Orr & Co., 1852): 45–46.
12. Fitzgerald's cruelty to dogs inspired Martin some years later to introduce legislation in Parliament for the prevention of cruelty to animals.
13. Sir Jonah Barrington, *Personal Sketches*, 2:270–271.
14. Ibid., 2:272–273.
15. James Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour*, 157.
16. MacCarthy, *Fighting Fitzgerald,* 173.

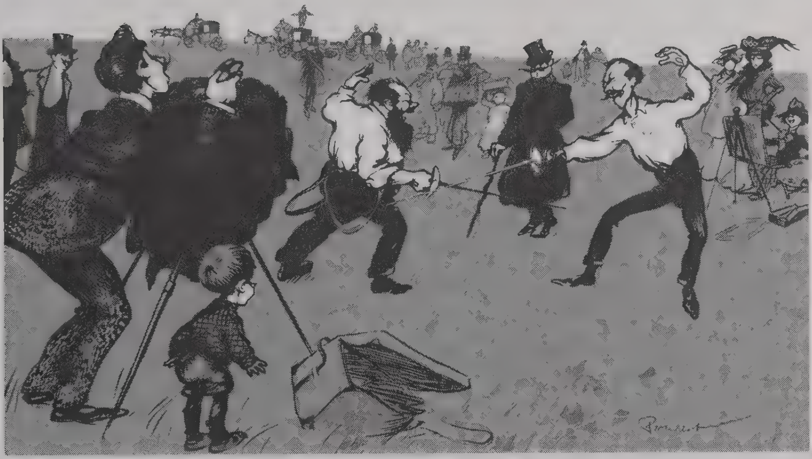
CONCLUSION: THE END OF THE DUEL

Even in dueling's heyday, its fundamental irrationality was obvious to most serious thinkers. It proved nothing, they pointed out, and put the lives and reputations of decent men at the mercy of drunkards and bullies. It could be unfair, requiring an unpracticed man to face an opponent of consummate skill. It put the injured party on the same footing as his offender: "You have wronged me, now kill me," seemed to be the logic. Furthermore, it flouted the law and was antithetical to the Christian faith that most European men of honor claimed to hold dear. Such arguments were well known, and yet dueling persisted. One early 19th-century reformer was told that he would never abolish "a practice sanctioned by time and precedent, which has withstood the raillery of the satirist, the terror of the penal laws, and the admonition of the pulpit, nay, the fear of a future state [the afterlife]."[1]

When dueling finally faded from the scene, it was due to a confluence of factors. One was, quite simply, that routine hard drinking had fallen out of favor among the gentry. Prior to the Victorian age, the amount of alcohol consumed at social gatherings would stagger the modern imagination, and it had been observed that "quarrels which end in blood most usually begin with whiskey."[2] Another was that in an enlightened age a moral and intellectual defense of dueling could no longer be sustained, and so it went the way of witch burning, slavery, and debtors' prisons. As an 1883 editorial put it, "These things have come to seem so monstrous, or ridiculous, or absurd, that they have become practically impossible. In other words, that great aggregation of forces, both moral and mental, called civilization, has banished them from the world."[3] In addition, with the rise of nationalism the idea of honor became bound up with that of citizenship. The gentleman now sought honor in service to his country rather than in private combats, and in obedience to its laws rather than in defiance of them. Duty, a civic virtue, came to be valued higher than honor, an individualistic one. Most of all, though, the aristocratic notions that underpinned dueling had little meaning by the beginning of the 20th century. As the middle class rose to social and political dominance, so did its values. Honor came to apply to all classes alike and was granted to "any man who has decent manners, is honourable in his business dealings, and is a useful member of society."[4] The notion of a superior caste that was above the law was no longer acceptable.

Great Britain was the first nation to see the end of dueling. By the 1840s, too many of its best and brightest had been sacrificed to honor, the "bloodstained god," for society to continue to countenance it. The British became known for settling disputes with their fists. This development was disdained by gentlemen on the Continent, who considered it uncouth to fight with anything but deadly weapons, but who at the same time did everything possible to render those weapons harmless. A European of the 1890s might be killed in a duel just as a man today might be killed playing touch football, but in either case the news would be greeted with considerable surprise.

Dueling persisted longest in those nations that favored the



“Don’t fool around! This is my last negative!” A French cartoon from 1903.

sword, and there were several signs that it had become a charade. One was duration: the murderous minute of Hamilton-Mohun had been replaced by the ineffectual two-and-a-half hours of Pini-San Malato. Another was quantity: there were Hungarian politicians in the 1920s and 1930s who fought 50 or 60 times in the course of their careers, which would have been impossible had there been any serious intent. Finally, there was the fact that dueling was no longer even prosecuted, so minimal was the threat that it posed. Writing about dueling in Argentina in the 1940s, journalist Holland McCombs noted that no one ever seemed to get killed despite all the shooting and cutting. “Nobody is supposed to get hurt,” he wrote. “But on the other hand nobody is supposed to act like they know nobody will get hurt. The proper way to act is to be full of Castilian dignity and give the impression that you, of course being a man of honor, understand all these things. The man of honor faces with proper funereal calm all the dramatic didoes [antics] attendant on such duels, including wailing families, last-minute wills and, of course, the full and not unwelcome glare of publicity." McCombs added that "dueling is sort of against Argentine law and some people say that if anybody should ever get really hurt it might spoil the fun for keeps."[5]

Without the element of mortal risk, dueling smacked of grandstanding, of honor on the cheap. It had become a publicity stunt, intended for the spilling of ink rather than blood. "Duels are fought in France," declared the *Nation* in 1883, "as so many other things are done, mainly for the sake of the notoriety. . . . Europeans do not wish to kill or be killed, or even to wound, but to be talked about."[6]

One can't give a precise date on which dueling died, but March 29, 1958, would be as good as any. On that day, 74-year-old marquis de Cuevas, director of the International Ballet, fought a duel with 52-year-old choreographer Serge Lifar outside Paris. The provocation had occurred nine days earlier, when Cuevas staged a performance of one of Lifar's dances without his permission. During the intermission, Lifar stalked up to Cuevas in the lobby and angrily flung a perfumed handkerchief at his feet. Cuevas picked it up and threw it back in Lifar's face. In the ensuing days seconds were chosen and a duel arranged; Cuevas' primary second was ex-paratrooper and right-wing politician Jean-Marie Le Pen. The principals granted numerous press interviews, and when they happened to run into each other at a TV studio, they exchanged harsh words: Lifar said, "I'll make you dance a minuet to my épée"; to which Cuevas scornfully replied, "Your handkerchief was so starched it could almost have drawn blood."

On March 29, the duelists were driven to a secret location followed by some 50 photographers and reporters. Lifar arrived bearing a Greek icon, a dagger, ballet slippers, and a small potted plant, explaining, "These are my symbols—faith, honor, art, and life." In the last of four two-minute rounds, the marquis nicked his opponent on the forearm. "Blood, blood, honor is saved!" cried Lifar exultantly. The marquis burst into tears, and the two embraced, declaring their mutual respect and admiration, all accusations of overstarched hankies forgiven.[7]

Other duels would be fought in the next 10 years, some of them nearly as farcical, but none more clearly demonstrated that the duel was played out. It had ended, finally, not because it was seen as too barbaric for a civilized society, but—more unbearably—as too ridiculous.

NOTES

1. Joseph Hamilton, *The Court of Honor for the Adjustments of Disputes* (London: 1829): vi–vii.
2. "Duelling," *American Monthly* 5 (April 1838): 334.
3. E.L. Godkin, "Southern and Other Duelling," *Nation* 36 (May 10, 1883): 398.
4. A. Heyking, "Russian and English Ideas About Duelling,"*Asiatic Review* 12 (1917): 313.
5. Holland McCombs, "Pistols at 50 Paces," *Life* 16 (March 20, 1944): 11–12, 14.
6. Godkin, "Southern and Other Duelling," 397–398.
7. "Out-of-This-World Duel," *Dance Magazine* 32 (May 1958): 41; "Paris Ballet Quarrel," *Times* (London), March 24, 1958, p. 6, col. 5; "Duel Ends in Tears and Embraces," *Times* (London), March 31, 1958, p. 6, col. 4; "Gay Blades," *Time* 71 (April 7, 1958): 26–27.

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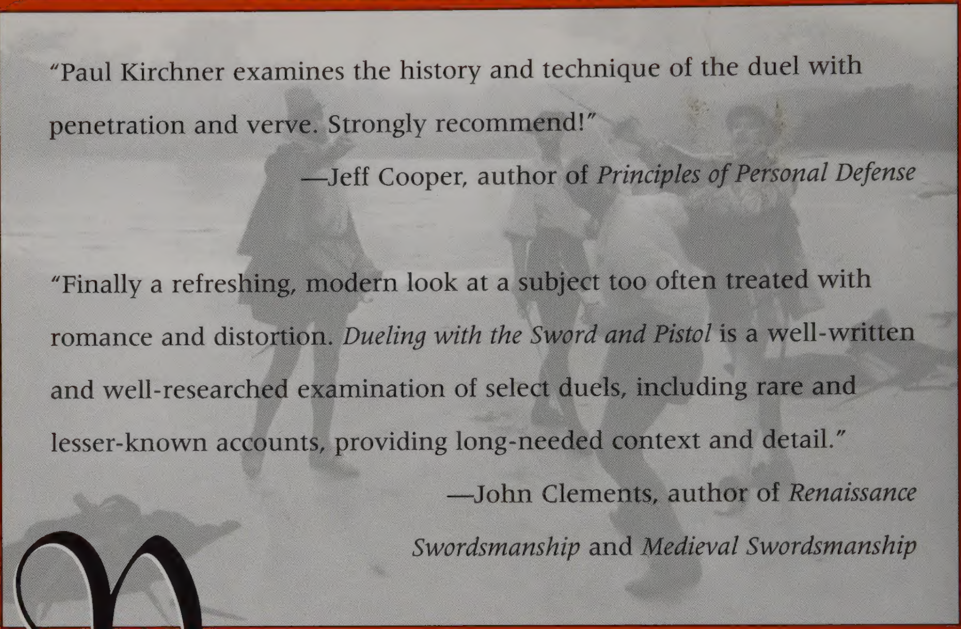

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